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**FIVE MONTHS AT CAIRO AND  
IN LOWER EGYPT.**



# FIVE MONTHS AT CAIRO

AND IN

## LOWER EGYPT.

AUTHORIZED TRANSLATION FROM THE FRENCH OF  
GABRIEL CHARMES

BY  
WILLIAM CONN.

WITH ADDITIONAL NOTES BY THE AUTHOR, NOW FIRST PUBLISHED.

"Where the tints of the earth, and the hues of the sky,  
In colour though varied, in beauty may vie,

"Tis the clime of the East; 'tis the land of the sun"

BYRON.

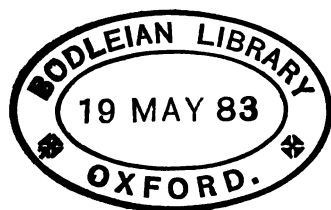


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# 2. FIVE MONTHS IN CAIRO AND LOWER EGYPT.

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## CHAPTER I.

### FROM MARSEILLES TO ALEXANDRIA.

FOR those not subject to sea-sickness, the passage from Marseilles to Alexandria is a real pleasure party. It lasts hardly six days, and is clearly divided into two periods. The first three days are delightful: the steamer follows the coast of France and Italy, passes the Straits of Messina, and remains a long time in sight of the coast of Calabria, whose varied forms and fine colours leave on the mind the most agreeable impression; in the evening of the third day Etna disappears on the horizon in a golden light, and during the last three days of the passage, we are on the open sea; at most, we perceive, when the air is very clear, the misty outline of Candia, like a great dark cloud hovering between the blue sky and the blue waves. We arrive in Egypt almost without seeing

the land, so little elevated is the soil of this admirable country above the level of the sea.

But to enjoy the pleasures of the trip, we must be free from sea-sickness. Now, almost all the accounts of voyages to Egypt that I had read before my departure, from the *Nil* of M. Maxime du Camp to the *Fellah* of M. About, commenced invariably with the description, more or less original, of the sufferings of passengers who could not resist the movement of the waves, the terrible rolling and still more terrible pitching. I can only follow this literary custom in relating merely what I saw in default of having felt them.

On leaving Marseilles, the steamer's deck is covered with a considerable crowd—relations, friends, mere acquaintances, come for a final hand-shaking with the voyagers ready to start. One might suppose that we were going to travel with a multitude of fellow voyagers, lively, agitated and full of business. But the steamer hardly begins to move before the deck clears as if by enchantment; a few only remain around you, who fix for the last time an involuntarily tender glance on the shore of their country. By degrees these persons themselves seem to experience a certain agitation that has nothing in common with a moral emotion; their faces become pale, but not from sadness; and long, but not from regret. As soon as the port of Joliette is passed, they are seen to go down one by one into the cabins; soon, one is alone or

almost alone on deck to contemplate the picture of Marseilles, set on the shore of the Mediterranean at the foot of a chain of hills, now of an aspect quite oriental.

It is a pity that such a picture should be admired by so small a number of spectators ; for this great city of Marseilles, overlooked by Notre-Dame-de-la-Garde, whose golden virgin shines in the distance like a sort of lighthouse closed in between the two forts Saint-Jean and Saint-Nicholas, above the creek Reserve, and extending as far as the promontory of Pharo, is a hundred-fold more beautiful to contemplate from the open sea than from the best chosen point on shore. We salute on passing the Faubourg des Catalans and the Château d'If, which romance has rendered quite as illustrious as history could have done. We double the island Mairé, whose jagged rocks, covered with white foam, present a gloomy and desolate aspect ; then we glide into the full Mediterranean in following afar off the wonderful coast of Provence, whose endless curves, and folds, and bluish hills, abrupt heights, sun-reddened slopes, graceful creeks, and symmetrical capes, leave their outlines and shades a long time on the horizon. Nothing is more beautiful than this coast of Provence, and that which follows it as far as Nice, Vintimille, and Genoa. Except at the Bay of Naples, you must not expect to find before arriving at Alexandria more charming effects of colour and more delicate combinations of outlines.



Soon, night falls, the dinner hour arrives. It is then, especially, one may recognize and measure the effects of sea-sickness. At the sound of the bell the table is surrounded with a respectable number of passengers; but soon, the glasses tinkle, the lustres swing overhead, the horizontal line of the sea rises and falls across the port-holes, the air seems close, every countenance assumes an indescribable expression, and when one looks around, the benches are seen to be suddenly vacated, and that the captain, the doctor, and a few sea-hardened old men are the only ones who have resisted this first attack where delicate stomachs have failed. The deck is again filled by people stretched on long chairs endeavouring to struggle against the indisposition that is tormenting them. The open air is the best remedy, but it is necessary to have the courage to support the open air. Most of the passengers shut themselves up in their cabins, from which they do not stir again. On arriving at Alexandria one is quite surprised at meeting a multitude of unknown and disconcerted faces which seem to come up from the bottom of the sea. Have there really been, after all, so many people in the steamer? One would never have suspected it.

On the morning of the second day, one wakes up off Corsica. When I was there, in the month of last December, the mountains of the island were covered with snow, which the first rays of a winter's sun reddened with a pale and modest tint. Corsica is

charming under this white dress, disappearing in the light clouds equally white, in making the dark slopes of the cliffs stand out in greater relief, which serve as a kind of fringe. Arrived off Cape Corsica, a magnificent whale, throwing forward two tapering streams of water, and raising above the level of the waves its long black body, followed the steamer for some time. It appears that it is well known to the sailors, for it has been living for many years in the same spot, where many voyagers have met it as well as I. Perhaps it has been placed there intentionally as a kind of advertisement or puff by the Company of the Messageries Maritimes. I was quite proud of having seen a whale in the Mediterranean at so short a distance from France ; but since everybody may see it there ! . . . . After Corsica we pass near the island of Elba and the bare rock of Monte Christo. Here history and romance look at each other. Which of the two is the most marvellous ? The fortune of the hero of Monte Christo begun on the sterile rock, which rises, isolated, amidst the waves of the Mediterranean, is not more wonderful, more fairy-like, more filled with prodigious events, than that of the extraordinary man whose destiny, narrowly escaped from being fulfilled at the island of Elba, went to accomplish itself at the other extremity of Africa, in the direction even, where his grand-nephew, the last heir of his glory, and the fatal chances attached to his name, came to fall in his turn under the ignoble weapon of a savage !

The morning of the third day rises over the shores of the Bay of Naples. We see afar off an enormous and indistinct mass; on approaching we recognise Ischia, whose cliffs fall almost perpendicularly into the sea. However beautiful the Bay of Naples may be, seen from Naples itself, I do not know whether it does not appear still more beautiful when one discovers it thus by degrees, in following one by one these beautiful islands of Ischia, Nisida, and Procida, so often sung by the poets. The few passengers who still remain on deck, tenderly pity their travelling companions shut up in their cabins, who, not a moment even in sight of this magnificent spectacle, think of murmuring between their pale lips :

“Combien de fois près du rivage  
Où Nisida dort sur les mers,  
La beauté crédule ou volage  
Accourut à nos doux concerts !”

And yet as soon as one arrives opposite to this brilliant chain of poetical islands, the sea seems to change colour, whilst the hills on the horizon, whilst Pausilippo, and, at the other extremity of the Bay of Naples, Vesuvius, are clad in varied shades of brilliant blue, the Mediterranean is spread out afar like an immense emerald-green sheet sprinkled with white spots which the sails of the fisherman's boats cast in every direction ! The entry into the port is amidst a deafening noise from a crowd of little boats which come and fix themselves to the sides of the steamer.

They are traders, musicians, acrobats, and even divers, who plunge to the bottom of the sea—in the middle of December even!—to pick up the small coppers that are there thrown to them. We remain five or six hours at Naples: it is then possible to go ashore and run rapidly through the town. The boldest go as far as Pompeii, whence they return out of breath. The most prudent are satisfied with going up to the monastery of San Martino, in order to contemplate for a few moments the panorama of the bay, the principal objects of which they had just been admiring. The ascent is not long, though the road follows a very deep declivity. This road is bordered on each side by broom in flower and verdant shrubs. I will not describe, after many others, the delightful spectacle presented to the eyes when one has arrived at San Martino, and then walks on the ramparts of the monastery. Who then could have admired it, once merely, and that once but a few minutes even, in leaving to his thoughts free scope to the tender and profound impressions which it inspires, to the invincible sentiments that are formed and developed, without retaining from such a scene a never-fading remembrance?

When I left Naples it was nightfall, and for the first time since my departure from Marseilles the sky was cloudless. Vesuvius, however, remained wrapt up in a sort of fog, which concealed three quarters of it; the summit alone was clear, and the lava which

flowed from it was like an immense glowing scarf unfurled amid the stars. This kind of *via lactea* of a sparkling red produced an effect difficult to describe. The view of Naples by night, in open sea, is moreover singularly beautiful ; the city and all the villages that extend along the bay, from Castellamara to Pausilippo, were filled with lights : one might imagine at a distance an immense fiery horseshoe. Put above this luminous semicircle a sky sown with stars and streaked with the sanguineous roll from Vesuvius ; listen to the murmuring of the waves breaking against the sides of the ship ; plunge in imagination into this immense mystery of the night, the winds, the waves, you will have an idea of one of those sublime scenes of nature whose charm imposes itself on imaginations the most unimpressible, and moves hearts as cold as stone !

About fifteen hours after leaving the Bay of Naples, we arrive at the Straits of Messina. These straits are so narrow that the two coasts are distinctly seen—the Italian and the Sicilian ; the houses, the gardens, the trees, the people even, appear in their true proportions. The coast of Italy is lower, and the less animated of the two ; it is composed of ranges of naked hills, interrupted here and there by torrents, or rather beds of torrents, of the largest dimensions, but which are filled only on stormy days, or at the melting of the snow. One may discern very clearly the railway to Reggio, a pretty little town situated

almost in face of Messina. The coast of Sicily, much more elevated, much more broken than the former, is formed of mountains cut in every direction by cascades and torrents, and covered with wood of an intense verdure. Etna commands it entirely, and its imposing and graceful brow, with its snows, some almost, some quite, perpetual, presents an aspect really sublime. At the summit of the volcano, the crater barely fuming, resembles a black crown surmounting a vast white cloak. The passage of the Straits of Messina lasts two hours, during which two hours one never tires of admiring. One barely notices, on passing, Charybdis and Scylla, so much dreaded by the ancients. This souvenir of classic terror dispels in no way the tranquil pleasure the aspect of so charming a strait inevitably excites.

When we have left it, we still perceive for a long while the blue coast of Calabria, bathed in the purest light. At last, Etna itself sinks under the horizon, and we fall upon a prospect, monotonous, scant,—I was going to say, almost mean, of the sea. We leave it no more this side of Alexandria. Whatever certain voyagers assert, the open sea is wearisome and fatiguing; it gives no idea of grandeur: on the contrary, the horizon there seems much nearer to the spectator than when the land, and especially the mountains, aid the eye to measure the distance. The three last days of the passage would, therefore, be gloomy enough but for the sun-risings and sun-

settings. But in proportion as we approach the East, the light of the rising and setting takes the tones of marvellous warmth ; the sky becomes deep green, as in the pictures of certain Oriental painters, and streaked in long lines with blood-red clouds, which the rays of the sun penetrate with golden darts.

After having sufficiently contemplated nature during the first three days of the voyage, the last three may serve to form an acquaintance with one's fellow voyagers. All those who are not condemned to perpetual sea-sickness are afoot ; the first attacked by the malady, once passed, have recovered, and begin to talk ; their observations give you a preliminary taste of the country you are going to see. Pre-occupied as a matter of business with the political question, I consulted several French passengers, who have been long established at Cairo or Alexandria, on the reforms undertaken by France and England in December, 1878, during the vice-royalty of Ismaïl Pacha. All, or almost all, I should say, asserted with a firm conviction that no progress could be possible so long as the Khedive remained on the throne. I found them very violent ; I blamed in them French volatility. I was obliged to admit later that they were right. The presence of a son of Ismaïl Pacha, Prince Hassan, generalissimo of the Egyptian armies, whom we had taken on board on leaving Naples, was no embarrassment to these observations. Like all Orientals, Prince Hassan was very affable, he was

seen constantly talking with the sailors and passengers of the third class. His suite was not numerous, it was composed of two or three persons, among whom a young pacha, who appeared to be the accomplished type of the European gentleman; of a nature delicate, nervous, intelligent, he might have been taken, and I took him for a product, the most refined of our civilization. Scratch the European Turk, you will find the Oriental with all his characteristics! This pacha had been one of the most docile instruments of the Khedive; it was he even who had served as jailer to that unhappy financial minister, Ismaïl Sadyk, who, as is known, has never come out of prison. I learnt that only on arriving at Alexandria. I had had then, without suspecting it, on board the steamer even, not only a specimen of the skies, but a specimen of the men of the East; so true is it that a passage rather long always prepares for a knowledge of the country one is going to visit.

The entrance of the port of Alexandria is singularly difficult: no Frenchman ought to be ignorant of it, since it is precisely what provoked the disaster of Aboukir. A violent tempest raged over the open sea when we perceived afar, like a needle bristling on the horizon almost imperceptibly, the Pharos of Alexandria. It was not everything, seeing the lighthouse; in a sea so raging, could we enter into the harbour? The question was very doubtful, and in



the absence of Prince Hassan it certainly would have been solved by a negative. But what does not one do, in the East especially, to spare a prince a few disagreeable hours? We feared to have had no pilot: we had two, and besides a great tow-boat. It was with this escort that we entered the great basin of Alexandria.

You must be quite close to this basin to distinguish the coast, which hardly rises, as I mentioned, above the level of the sea. This coast, moreover, has nothing remarkable: on the right extends a series of sand-hills, covered with windmills, then an immense building, which served as a palace to Said Pacha. Alexandria occupies the centre of the water-line. On the left, Ramleh—a little pleasure station, where the Alexandrians go to take their sea baths and refuge in summer, to escape from the overwhelming heat of the city—spreads out its walls, bleached and grilled by the sun. What is striking in this spectacle, not remarkable of itself, is the novel tint of the firmament, the ground, the trees, and the houses. At the sight of those old walls, baked and rebaked by the heat, whose red hue recalls the pictures of Marilhat, you recognize the East. The entrance of the great basin is imposing: it was particularly so the day of my arrival. Every fort that covered the beach fired salvos of cannon; the ships were decked with flags; the sailors on the yard-arms shouted enthusiastically; the military bands launched forth

notes that were lost in the general tumult; a hundred little boats, filled with Arabs clad in many-coloured costumes, followed the steamer in cheering us. It would have depended on me only to have persuaded myself that all this ceremony was in my honour! It seemed so strange to a Frenchman, accustomed to domestic life in Paris, to find himself all at once transplanted in the full East, that it would be easy for him to admit that the East had put itself to some expense to receive him. But, alas! if this little vanity had penetrated into my mind, it would not have long dwelt there. Hardly had we stopped, when an Egyptian battalion, led by a general wearing enormous epaulettes, the medal of the Medjidié on his breast, a damascened sabre at his side, a képi, quite covered with golden lace on his head, came to salute Prince Hassan and offer his services to remove his luggage. The prince having left, the general occupied himself with the baggage—in fact, like a simple agent. On seeing him, the list in his hand, trying to recognise and then to get up on deck the prince's trunks, which his officers and soldiers afterwards carried away, I was indeed obliged to admit that it was not for me that Alexandria had spread its bunting and fired its cannon. I had no general to get up my trunks! By way of retaliation, I had to protect them against a crowd of monsters, black, bronzed, and yellow, clad in costumes as brilliant in their style as the general's uniform, or in

ragged and tattered a thousand times more picturesque. Everyone wanted to seize them, either to take me into their boat, or to conduct me to some particular hotel. Hardly had we arrived in the harbour before the steamer is literally taken by assault by this swarm of natives, yelling, laughing, gesticulating, hustling one another, and almost crushing the voyagers. I took the Orientals to be reserved and silent ; this first experience has proved that the Egyptians at least are wonderfully communicative and turbulent : this impression has subsequently been amply justified. At last, I gave myself up to a splendid nigger of imposing figure and with a look almost ferocious. It was under his care that I entered Alexandria. No doubt my vanity would have been more flattered if a general covered with medals had carried my portmanteau ; but in a country where equality does not exist, we take what we find, and, in default of a general gilded over every seam, we must be contented with a negro, as black as ebony and as strong as Hercules !

## CHAPTER II.

### ALEXANDRIA.

ON arriving at Alexandria, most travellers, especially when the fatigues of the journey have disposed them for philosophical reflections, struck with the entirely modern character and little extent of this city, formerly so celebrated, write a few eloquent pages on the versatility of human things and on the violent revolutions that destroy temples, palaces, gymnasiums, and libraries, to replace them by European houses of rather bad taste. Never has a subject, we must admit, better offered itself to developments of this kind. However little the imagination may be stocked with history, philosophy, art, and politics, the souvenirs of Alexander, of Ammonius, of Plotinus, of Porphyrius, of Amru, of Omar, etc., without forgetting those of Antony and Cleopatra, murmur in the memory as soon as we perceive Alexandria. This is what has become then of this city, which passed in antiquity for the most beautiful in the world! It was still beautiful when Amru led into it his victorious army. "I have conquered the City of the West," wrote he to

Omar, "and I could not enumerate all that is contained within its walls. It contains four thousand baths, and twelve thousand dealers in green vegetables, four thousand Jews paying tribute, four thousand musicians and dancers." *Utile dulci!* There were as many Jews paying tribute as musicians and dancers helping to spend it. The world has much changed! At present, the Jews, however little European they may be, or however little protected by any European Consul whomsoever, pay no longer anything at all. As a consequence, the musicians and dancers have equally diminished in number and importance. As to the dealers in green vegetables, I cannot say whether they have submitted to the same law of decadence. One, however, may rest easy: it is evidently not vegetables that will ever be wanting in Egypt.

Amru had good reasons for admiring Alexandria; he had not taken it without striking a blow; he even narrowly escaped paying for his conquest with his life. Fallen in an assault into the hands of the enemy, with his lieutenant Mouslemeh ben Mokhallad and his freed-man Ouerdân, the patrician of the city had all three brought before him.—"You are my prisoners," said he to them, "inform me what you wished to do with us, and for what object you make war against us." Mahometan uncompromising, Amru replied to him, "We will either convert you to Islamism, our religion, or subject you to pay us tribute; and we shall not cease to

fight until the orders of God have been fully executed." Amru was brave, but wanted prudence. Struck with the haughtiness of his language, the Greeks, who did not know which were the prisoners, understood that they had to do with quite another thing than with simple soldiers.—"This man," said the patrician, turning to his guards, "can be no other than one of the principal chiefs of the Mussulman army: let his head be struck off!" But Ouerdân knew the Greek language: he had heard and understood the patrician's orders. Immediately pulling Amru with violence and giving him a hard blow. "What is that," cried he, "and what is the meaning of those words? Thou, one of the least of our army, durst thou explain the intentions of thy chiefs; be silent and leave those to speak who are above thee." At this scene, the patrician, changing his opinion on the supposed rank of Amru, revoked his order. It was Mouslemeh's turn to speak. "Our general," said he, "is ready to retire, but he would like to establish a conference between the leaders of each army to settle the conditions of his departure; we will inform him of your humanity to us, and this consideration will contribute not a little to the decision he is going to take." The patrician fell into the snare: he gave Amru and his companions their liberty, who soon re-entered as conquerors into the city, from which they had escaped as prisoners by a process somewhat Jesuitic.

Amru was right in calling Alexandria "the City of the West." Greek civilisation, whence came Western civilisation, had shone there with a last and still charming brilliancy. The Arabs came to inherit this civilisation, and to bear it on the arms of their victorious soldiers as far as into the heart of Spain ; but the fatal principle of Islamism would not permit them to accept the final consequences of it, and it was, in fact, a germ of death that Amru introduced into Alexandria when he made his triumphal entry into it amidst universal enthusiasm, the first Friday of the month of Moharrem, of the year 20 of the Hegira, whilst the solemn prayers of the Mussulmans rising towards heaven rendered thanks to Allah for so brilliant a success.

This germ of death has singularly developed since : Alexandria is now no more than a little town without character, either European or Arabian, but holding an intermediate position between the West and the East. It is the centre of the commerce and the business of all Egypt, and if it is not the official capital, since the Viceroy resides at Cairo, it is at least the real capital of the European colonies, which, through infiltration, are in the way of making the conquest of this rich and fruitful country as surely, perhaps, as the Arabs did formerly by their arms. It is there that is established the Court of Appeal of the new judicial organisation, that is to say, decidedly the greatest political force in contemporary Egypt. It

is there also the great banking houses, the brokers of all kinds, the agents of commerce and contraband, have established their centre of operations. Immense fortunes have been made there these latter years. Luxury shines there in all its splendour, rather European though than Oriental. Many streets strongly resemble our French streets : when one is promenading there, in order to remember that one is in Egypt, it is necessary to turn one's eyes from the houses and contemplate merely the mottled crowd of passers-by. These streets indicate their names, and each house has its number, what is nowhere else seen in Egypt. In Cairo, for instance, if you ask for the address of a person, they will tell you for your full information, that he lives near such and such a person who is known. It is for you to find out his residence on this scanty information. This business requires sometimes many hours' searching. With such a system, of course, there could be no postmen. Every one claims his letters at the post-office on indicating his surname, Christian name, and profession. As almost all the Arabs are called Mohamed, Mahmoud, Hussein, or Hassan, the problem is singularly complicated for them, and many letters go astray. The streets of Alexandria, moreover, are paved, a thing quite special to this city, or rather to certain districts of this city. In the others, and even at Cairo, the dust and the mud have it all their own way. But it would be an error to suppose that it is the Egyptian



administration who has incurred the cost of paving : it is the merchants and the Europeans, who, tired of conveying their merchandise over almost impracticable roads, assembled together one day to carry out this great enterprise. That has not been so easy as one might suppose. It was necessary to come to an understanding with the proper authorities. Now, who were these authorities? Nobody knew them. The European merchants found themselves at first in presence of a kind of municipal council ; all at once this council disappeared, and it was with the governor-general of Alexandria that they were obliged to treat : but the governor disappeared in his turn, and the commission came suddenly to life again. Amidst all these administrative revolutions the European merchants have pursued their work with tenacity ; they have formed a committee, which has paid the half of the work ; the proprietors of the houses have paid the other half. But there was a house inhabited by a *santon*, and a saint could not be subjected to the common law ! The European merchants clubbed together to exempt the saint from all material sacrifice. The Mussulmans could not permit a *santon* to pay any tax whatever. Like the rat of La Fontaine, the affairs here below in no way concern him. The unhappy fellahs pay the taxes they owe, as well as those they do not owe, without venturing on the slightest murmur ; but a revolution was very near breaking out in a district of Upper Egypt

because a collector claimed his assessment from a *santon* ! It might have been serious to stir up for a few paving stones a commotion of this sort in Alexandria. Let us not, however, admire disproportionately the generosity of the Europeans. What they have done for the *santon* certainly does not compensate for what the natives give them every day. The Europeans pay no municipal tax, no rate on their houses, stables, gardens, etc. : it is the natives who are obliged to provide for all the expenses for the maintenance and embellishment of the city. God knows, however, how little they profit by it ! What is it to them the wide boulevards, the well-paved streets, the gaslighting, etc. ? To all these refinements of an advanced civilisation, they would prefer by far their narrow lanes of old, half buried under the *moucharabiehs*, which the sun and the heat never penetrate, and where one may, in case of need, lie down to sleep in the shade and open air without being driven over by the carriage of a European going at full speed.

Everything is changed ! Alexandria, at present, is filled with carriages—private carriages and hired carriages, which closely resemble our cabs. The differences are in their favour : they are admirably kept, and have for drivers, instead of a coachman coarse and rough, a fine Arab clad in a long robe, white or blue, his head covered with a scarlet *tarbouche*, who invites you to take your place with a wonderful volubility of seductive phrases.

I have already said how much I was surprised at the noisy character of the Egyptians. The Italians do not give themselves half so much movement. They do not use a quarter of the words that these utter in the space of a minute! There is in the streets and in the public places a perpetual going and coming, a tumult and deafening shouting. On walking about, the day of my arrival, a large garden surrounded with high walls, I was astonished at the noise rising all round me, and which never ceased. One might have thought that the waves of the sea were coming and breaking with a roar against the walls. The Arabs, in fact, remain for whole hours crouching and silent; they work the whole day in the bazaars without opening their lips. But then, indeed, they make up for it so soon as they find themselves together or in the presence of foreigners. The markets of Cairo and Alexandria resound unceasingly with the most frightful uproar. The Arabic language, with its hoarse and hard sounds, contributes perhaps in producing that sensation of noise. In the mouths of the children, and especially in the women's, it takes tones so sharp and screeching that one can hardly bear them. Never have the Halles of Paris, or the barges of the washerwomen on the Seine, witnessed such broils as those that happen every day in the public places of Cairo and Alexandria. It is not at all uncommon to see there two old vixens, more hideous a hundred-fold than the

witches in *Macbeth*, abusing each other, howling like wild beasts, tearing out their hair, covering their faces with mud, ripping up their chemises, which serve them for their sole costume, at the risk of presenting to the sight a spectacle with which the most determined naturalist would find it difficult to be charmed.

Though half European, the city of Alexandria, however, gives a very true foretaste of the East. The Place des Consuls, the principal streets, and especially the popular quarters, are filled with Arabs, fellahs, Greeks, Albanians, Nubians, and negroes of every race. This medley crowd presents a delightful spectacle in the sunshine. Already are presented the principal types, the principal costumes, which we shall see later on penetrating into the interior of Egypt. All that, moves, bustles, and resounds in a strange tumult of sounds and colours. One begins also to admire the great variety of rags and tatters, which in the dazzling light of Egypt have an aspect so picturesque, sometimes even so imposing. I remember a fine youth, about twenty, coloured with an indefinite tint between yellow and chestnut, who was promenading haughtily in the Place des Consuls, wearing as sole costume a dirty rag split from top to bottom, before as well as behind, and which formed merely two long epaulettes falling over the arms. He did not seem to suspect that it would have been preferable, at least according to our European

ideas, to put on his dress upside down, as a kind of chasuble. Every country has its customs!

The real interest of Alexandria is in the European colonies that reside there. There are two ways of regarding these colonies. If one is a severe moralist, if one experiences an invincible repulsion for speculations and speculators, if one mistrusts business transactions and those who make them too productive, the society of the European colonies becomes easily wearisome; but if one is simply a traveller, who wishes to amuse himself and gather from his travels agreeable impressions, it is quite different. Then the European colonies are charming, and one cannot frequent them too assiduously. The men, to tell the truth, are a great deal too much occupied there with the price of cotton and the quotations of the "six" to be always amusing; but the women there are adorably beautiful. Few cities contain women so pretty as Alexandria. The return from the Catholic mass and the Greek mass is celebrated; chairs are hired by those interested to assist at the almost interminable line of faces of rare perfection that passes every Sunday. The Greeks particularly are admirable; they become very soon a little corpulent, but it is the common lot of the Eastern women, and here at least this kind of charm is very highly esteemed. Their eyes are very large and incomparably brilliant, their features of antique regularity, their pale complexion heightens the beauty of a

type which the least tint of colour would spoil ; they want only that special grace of gait—that indefinable delicacy and lightness which seems to be reserved to the West, no doubt by way of compensation for lack of *embonpoint*. Moreover, Alexandria enjoys an untiring gaiety. The *réunions*, the balls, the country parties are renewed unceasingly ; dancing, music, every pleasure intrudes. I speak only from rumour, having passed but a few days at Alexandria ; but everybody in Egypt has told me the same thing about the high spirits, the good humour, the hospitable feeling of this amiable city. It has preserved through the course of centuries a vague reflection of that *vie inimitable* into which Cleopatra led Antony, and which the good Plutarch, strict moralist as he was, describes not without emotion.

It would be in vain, however, when night falls, if one were still to seek the two heroes of this extraordinary life, dressed as slaves, running through the streets, stopping at the doors and windows to laugh at the people, braving in mad pranks the insults and blows of the *canaille*, thinking only of love, fun, and pleasure. All that has disappeared with the wonders of ancient Alexandria ; with the Jews, the dancers, and the dealers in green vegetables of Amru ; with Arabian civilisation itself that Amru had brought, and which, like the rest, has fled for ever. It would need a very lively imagination to revive at night in modern Alexandria the souvenirs of a departed

world. Everywhere little itinerant dealers lay out comestibles of every kind—nougats, red and white, fancy cakes, dates, and preserved fruits. Great droll fellows make their bronzed and smiling faces shine. Soon the colours die away, the costumes so varied in the daytime are bathed in a sombre and uniform tint; the doors close; merely the Arabian and European cafés, the gaming houses, and other establishments more than suspicious, remain open, noisy, and well-lighted. What most strikes the eye is to see along the walls near every shop Arabs stretched out, hardly protected against the wind by some boards of an old packing case, and against the cold by a light covering. They sleep with one eye open, but they raise their heads at the least noise.

They are keepers charged to protect the merchandise against thieves—a precaution, as it appears, not at all useless. At every quarter of an hour they utter a cry, which every one ought to repeat after the one that precedes him, and which, in being prolonged the whole length of the street, reaches the next, and is thus spread throughout the district. It is by these means the guardians prove that they are awake. A sheik who presides over their corporation passes at uncertain intervals, and administers some sharp lashes of the courbache to all those found asleep. These noises, which succeed regularly till morning, produce in the silence of the night a mysterious impression. A newspaper correspondent, therefore, who, having

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arrived in Egypt for the opening of the Suez Canal, had no doubt whatever that the noise that troubled his slumber was the chanting of the Mouezzins calling the faithful to prayers. He hastened to write to his newspaper, supporting the Catholic cause, that the Mussulmans were much more devout than the Christians, since they prayed the whole night long ; and he added to this novel reflection this curious circumstance—that the Mouezzins, who are up in the minarets during the day, sleep at night along the pavement in packing cases, a custom which, according to him, still remained to be explained from a religious point of view. How many writers have given on Egypt information of the same kind, and even on matters more serious !



### CHAPTER III.

#### THE MAHMOUDIEH CANAL—VEGETATION—THE GARDENS OF EGYPT—FROM ALEXANDRIA TO CAIRO.

THE left bank of the Mahmoudieh Canal is the favourite promenade of the inhabitants of Alexandria. It would be difficult to find one more picturesque and more charming. The Mahmoudieh Canal was made under the reign of Méhémet-Ali in 1819 and 1820 ; it cost £300,000 ; 25,000 labourers have been employed on it. It connects Alexandria with the Nile and with Cairo, and serves as a highway for the internal commerce of Egypt. Certainly, few works have been more useful than those ; but they have been executed, like everything that has been done for centuries in this unfortunate country, at the price of the cruellest sufferings. Alexandria wanted a canal. Méhémet-Ali did not hesitate ; thousands of fellahs brought together under the courbache were forced to dig one with their hands, carrying away in their blue tunics, the earth their stiffened fingers had dug up, and pushing this painful work to its last stroke without having for an instant the right to stop, to repose, or to complain

Méhémet-Ali was a great man, but a great man of the East ; he counted for nothing the life of his subjects : provided the end was attained, the effort was not of the slightest importance.

One little thinks besides, when promenading to-day near the Mahmoudieh Canal, of indulging in philanthropic regret and of deploring the misery of those who delved there. Nothing is more pleasing than the sight of this canal, which gives, for the first time, to the recently-landed voyager, the impression already complete of the East. On the bank which serves for a promenade, a superb avenue of acacias and sycamores extends by a series of villas and gardens : these houses with barred windows and high walls, with vivid colours, red, yellow, and blue, belong mostly to rich pachas. They are the first harems we fall in with in Egypt, and however disposed one may be not to surrender oneself to vulgar emotions, it is difficult not to experience a particular sensation in view of these asylums, mysterious and strange, and full of surprises and illusions for the European imagination. The gardens, moreover, are admirable ; the garden of Moharrem Bey, which now belongs to Nubar Pacha, the Garden Pastré, the Garden Antoniadis, covered with palms, bananas, cactus, aloes, bamboos, dates, mimosas with their yellow flowers, red euphorbiums, Bengal fig-trees, whose long stems, springing from the trunk and the branches, fall and plant themselves in the soil and there form new trees,

line the long avenue, where on Sundays and Fridays crowd the elegant society, Christian and Mussulman, of Alexandria. One should visit these gardens in detail if one would be acquainted with the variety and richness of Egyptian vegetation. Marvellous avenues of sycamores that extend over the head of the wanderer a thick and deep vault, provide shade and coolness so necessary in such a country. Here and there arise groups of shrubs so close to each other that the eye can hardly penetrate them. On this mass of sombre verdure large scarlet leaves resemble great drops of blood ; and as we are quite close to the harems, nothing hinders certain persons endowed with much sensibility from imagining at this spectacle some possible oriental tragedies, which should certainly have more affinity to romance than to reality.

The other bank of the Mahmoudieh Canal, much less brilliant, is still more interesting to the eyes of Europeans. It is the beginning of Egypt. Poor villages built with Nile mud extend in the distance : the hovels of the fellahs, kinds of earthen cubes of grey colour, roofed merely with the dried leaves of the sorgho, are there grouped in indescribable disorder. Women clad in a long blue chemise, as in the pictures of Fromentin, come to the canal to fill with water the heavy amphoræ, which they afterwards raise lightly on their heads with a movement full of elegance. Around them, children, naked or almost naked, gambol in the dust or in the mud ; lank-looking dogs

scratch over the ground in search of some cast-away food. Beyond this tableau, at once picturesque and sordid, extends as a background, the immense open country of Egypt, quite green, till it joins in the distance a firmament of transparent blue. The canal is filled with boats, canges, long boats towed by camels, or dragged slowly along by fellahs. A few heads of buffaloes asleep under water appear at the surface : a pelican is swimming yonder ; flocks of birds are crossing the sky. We feel at last in a new world, and if it were not for the elegant calèches in which flare the ultra toilets of Paris, we might really fancy ourselves transported into that vague and delightful medium of the Thousand and One Nights, whose vision never ceases to pursue the least poetic of travellers.

I had for a travelling companion one little imbued with poesy. A man very agreeable and very lively, always in good humour, full of happy sayings and amusing tricks, he had come to Egypt, not to search for tales like those of Schérazade, nor historical souvenirs nor impressions of art, but—would one guess it?—a particular kind of wild goose which is found, it seems, only on the Upper Nile. As a very distinguished naturalist, he has been, I must admit, of very great service to me ; for without him I should never have suspected the existence of half the natural productions of Egypt in the animal as well as in the vegetable kingdom. Alas, I cannot praise myself for having rendered him in another order of ideas 'a

similar service. Notwithstanding my efforts to make him admire the Egyptian and Arabian monuments, I could never succeed in drawing him off from his constant preoccupation. The marvellous mosques of Cairo seemed to him miserable ruins, dirty and infected. "I don't like ruins," said he, "unless they are covered with a thick vegetation that hides them from me."

At the Pyramids, whilst I was evoking the souvenir of forty centuries, he was talking seriously with a group of Arabs, to glean information about some curious animals that are found in the neighbourhood ; but as the dialect of these Arabs was a mixture of English, French, Italian, Greek, and all the indigenous dialects, Science was near upon the point of enregistering one of those formidable errors which give her so much trouble afterwards to get rid of ! My companion believed they had offered him a goat without horns, what seemed to him very curious ; but, on the contrary, it was a cat without horns they meant ; in other words, a lynx of the commonest kind. Before dispelling this error, what interminable discussions ! The Arabs could not understand that a harmless cat should excite so much astonishment : my companion, on the other hand, ill explained himself, when they spoke of a goat without horns as being a very common beast. He imagined himself on the point of making a fine discovery, which would compensate for the little success of his travels ; for, oh illusion ! the

famous wild goose for which he had traversed the Mediterranean was found nowhere. I am mistaken : it is recognized very distinctly on the old hieroglyphics at the Museum of Boolak. For the first time, my travelling companion understood the interest of antiquities. " Since I am at St. Peter's, the description of which may be read in many travels," said Duclos, in the account of his own journey in Italy, " it is sufficient to refer to them ; I confine myself to a reflection on the difference of the character of the Popes from that of other sovereigns." " Since we are at Boolak, whose mummies resemble all those you have already seen at the Louvre and elsewhere," my companion would readily have said, " admire, at last, the true portrait of the goose which I came in search of as far as the Pyramids, and which, alas ! I have not found there." Other hieroglyphics represent apes, the exact family of which he pointed out to me. The dogs, the oxen, the asses of the epoch of the Pharaohs presented also remarkable peculiarities. There is, after all, some good in hieroglyphics : one might make on them a series of lectures on retrospective natural history. Now, there was no reason to regret a passage of six days and a two months' journey, when one had arrived at determining very exactly what race of animals flourished under such and such a dynasty. If my travelling companion had not had his goose, he had at least brought from Egypt a hedgehog of a particular

species and a young negress, without forgetting a few beetles, more or less genuine, which he intended to distribute among his friends. "What would you have me do?" said he; "we must at least yield to prejudices. I buy beetles, but I regret my goose; and without my hedgehog and my negress, my journey would certainly have been lost!"

I am indebted to this companion of an original mind for having visited in detail all the interesting gardens of Cairo and Alexandria. The first thing that struck me, at a horticulturist's in Alexandria, was a magnificent row of pots, which appeared to have been attended to, and kept up, with admirable order, and which contained nothing but grass. What was that grass there for? They were not long in explaining to me that no plant was rarer in Egypt, and that it was cultivated here with special care. Ismaïl Pacha had incurred enormous expense in trying to maintain in his gardens a few grass-plots: he never succeeded. The layer of soil is so thin in Egypt, that the sun dries it up immediately, and unless the grass be constantly submerged, it turns yellow and perishes at once. It is not the heat alone that produces this result, for there is much very fine grass in the tropics; but the heat, accompanied with the shallowness of the soil, renders the culture of grass impossible in Egypt. It is with difficulty that a few isolated blades of grass sprout, during winter, along the Nile and the canals; they disappear as

soon as spring begins, so that everywhere in the country where artificial cultivation finishes, the dry and bare desert begins. The lawns of the public gardens are exclusively formed of the *Zapania nodiflora*, a pretty little verbenacea, which has been devoted to this purpose barely longer than ten years. It is still the thinness of the soil which hinders a tree, very much in vogue in the south of France, the eucalyptus, from developing in Egypt. It grows there at first rapidly, but then it remains always weak and sickly, for its roots, tap-rooted, soon come in contact with the sand under the mud of the Nile. On the other hand, the mimosa, the tamarisk, the sycamore, the acacia, the beek, assume in ten years the proportions of large trees, sometimes gigantic. The palm, that grows slowly, and whose tapering stem is always very weak, spreads above the other trees its greyish-green plume. The palms are of each sex. The most elegant, the male, has the form almost of a ball, so much do its branches fall, whilst curving gracefully. The female stupidly raises hers to the skies. In the spring, a kind of green sheath, like the head of a lance, springs from the stem of the palm, male as well as female. At the end of a few weeks this sheath opens, and a great bouquet of white filaments comes forth to mix its light colour with the deep green of the branches. When this bouquet is cut, it forms a very pretty ornament ; but one takes care not to cut it uselessly. That of the



female palm is the less beautiful ; it is composed of a series of white fibres, on which may be clearly distinguished minute dates. They are merely the germs of dates requiring to be fertilized. The fibres of the male are covered with little flowers, which send off, in blooming, a whitish dust. When the date tree begins to bloom, towards the end of March, or in April, the Arabs fertilize the female artificially. A single male is sufficient for a hundred female trees : they divide a male bouquet into little branches, having each a score of flowers, and fix them at the tops of the female trees ; the wind completes the operation. The wood of the palm-tree is worthless for constructing ; but they build with it in the gardens charming kiosks. The olive, the orange, the lemon, the banana, grow everywhere with admirable vigour. As soon as a banana-tree has produced its fruit, it dries up ; it is then cut down, but a fresh stem springs from its root, and soon, large, jagged leaves spread a thick shade around them. The tamarisk is a simple shrub in Provence ; it becomes a great tree in Egypt : it is the same with the mimosa. Ibrahim Pacha, who was as remarkable an agriculturist as a general, had sent a ship to India simply to search and bring cuttings of the principal trees of that country. All, or nearly all, have succeeded in Egypt. Ismaïl Pacha continued these experiments in arboriculture, which have given most magnificent results.

At the beginning of March the gardens of Egypt are really wonderful ; the orange and lemon trees spread there their most pungent odour ; the rose trees are covered with innumerable flowers ; the palms, with their green and white crowns, swing there in the wind ; the oleanders there border the avenues : on the lawns, anemones, annual and perpetual flowering pinks, chrysanthemums, violets, zinnias, periwinkles, snapdragons, mignonette, pansies, petunias, narcissi, and jonquils, etc., etc., blend their innumerable colours with the green of the *Zapania nodiflora* and the shrubs. Groups of bamboo lift here and there their long green or golden stems, crowned with an immense plume of pretty little trembling leaves. One comprehends on seeing these stems, which assume in a few months enormous proportions, the cruelly ingenious punishment of the Chinese in binding a criminal to a young bamboo. The plant grows, and the wretch is quartered in a few weeks ! No wood is lighter or more useful than that of the bamboo. One does not understand why the Egyptians neglect to plant it along the canals, and on every cultivated land, where it grows so well. But what gives, at least during winter and spring, the most smiling aspect to the Egyptian gardens, are the great sheets of rose bougainvilleas that cling to the walls, the trees and groups of foliage, and which display everywhere the varied and exquisite tints of their flowers. The bougainvillea is certainly the

finest of climbing plants. During five months its flowers, under the winter sun, take shades of extreme delicacy, one might say a light rose trail, the intensity of which every play of light varies. The aloes, the agave, attach themselves on rocky slopes. On the banks of the water-courses the blue lotus and the papyrus still revive antique reminiscences. The greenhouses are not less remarkable than the gardens; but it would take ten pages to describe them, and I have already allowed myself to be led away too long by the remembrance of delightful promenades, wherein my companion, the naturalist, served me as guide and instructor.

I return to Alexandria, to take the train there which is to conduct me to Cairo. Hardly have we crossed the lake Maréotis, where are produced on fine days the most fairy-like mirages, when we find ourselves really in Egypt. Vast plains, richly cultivated, spread out on all sides as far as an horizon, not closed by a single hill. Canals intersect them everywhere. On the banks of these canals, fellahs, with or without costume, raise water by means of a *chadouf* and *nattaleh*. The shelving banks serve for roads, and a considerable crowd may be seen there moving on. Sometimes it is an Arab who is fleeing on horseback at full gallop; sometimes a fellah walking slowly, leaning on a long staff; sometimes a woman covered with a black veil, her head bearing a heavy burthen, which does not hinder her from carry-

ing on her raised hand a gargoulette filled with water, and holding a naked child astride on her shoulder. A file of camels, with the head of each tied to the tail of the one that precedes, moves on solemnly. Black buffaloes graze in the fields on the giant trefoil called *bersim*. A child watches them whilst a flock of herons (ox-keepers) fly around them, and pitch, without ceremony, on their hardened backs. A series of towns and villages are met with : Damanhour, which the soldiers in Bonaparte's expedition imagined to be a city of the Thousand and One Nights, and which caused them such a painful deception, Tel-el-Barout, Kafr-el-Zaiat, Tantah, whose fair recalls the most scandalous saturnalia of antiquity, etc. It is at a short distance from Tel-el-Barout that one crosses for the first time the Nile, or rather the Rosetta branch. The wide river rolls its yellow waves under a sky of azure through an endless plain covered with the richest products. The temperature changes abruptly ; it becomes sensibly warmer : now, we indeed enter Egypt. At every stoppage of the train women charged with baskets of oranges, children carrying gargoulettes filled with cold water, the blind, the most unlikely-looking beggars rush on the carriages, uttering the formidable cry *backchiche ! backchiche !* which one is doomed to hear ten times a minute so long as he sojourns in Egypt. Most of the villages are surmounted by pigeon-houses : there are villages inhabited entirely by pigeons ; they are com-

posed of enormous hives of grey earth, two or three times higher than the fellahs' hovels, disposed in regular lines, interrupted at intervals by a few palm trees. Nothing is more curious than the aspect of these pigeon villages. The first time one sees them, one is at a loss to understand the use of such strange constructions, which cannot be human habitations, and which would be gigantic for bees. By degrees the valley gets narrower ; the yellow line of the desert appears ; the Pyramids, rose tinted in the morning light, rise in the horizon ; at last the mosque of Méhémet Ali, which commands Cairo, lifts its cupola and two-pointed minarets on the summit of the hill of Mokatam. A forest of cupolas and minarets rise everywhere. We are arrived.

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## CHAPTER IV.

### CAIRO.

A PROVERB says, Paris was not built in a day : it is the same with Cairo. As soon as you cast a glance over this city, you perceive that it is surrounded with ruins. All around the present precincts, arose populous cities filled with palaces and monuments, now disappeared. It is with their ruins that Cairo is built ; it is on their rubbish that rise its mosques, its houses, its grand and sumptuous edifices. No race has been endowed with the genius of masonry to so high a degree as the Arab race : its rage for building is equalled only by its indifference to maintaining what it has built. It has no care for the solidity of its work ; the walls are raised in a hurry and heedlessly with the first materials that come to hand. Provided they are covered with brilliant arabesques, splendid marbles, bronzes graven with the rarest perfection, it little matters that all these riches repose on a fragile mass shaken unceasingly by the wind of the desert, and which in our rainy climates would not long resist the rigours of the atmosphere. As soon as a mosque

—as soon as a palace is finished, it is left to fall. It is the same with towns as with mosques and palaces. The Arabs prefer by far building new ones to developing and embellishing those already in existence. What is most wanting to this race, which has been endued with all the gifts of imagination—fancy, originality, grace, refinement, elegance, and taste—is steadiness of mind, the love of tradition. It is in no way conservative. Incapable of organization, it seems that life begins again every day for it, that adventures succeed to other adventures, and consequently that it is useless to try to establish anything solid and durable in presence of an uncertain future. Notwithstanding their walls of stone, cities for the Arab are encampments in the desert: every conqueror, every chief, establishes his own on the very spot of his victory; but when it disappears, his successors strike again their tents and run to seek further off, according to the ever-changing caprice of fortune, fresh glory and a fresh abode.

Since the beginning of the Arabian conquest this instability of humour has never failed to manifest itself. We have spoken of the enthusiasm of Amru for Alexandria, which had just been the intellectual capital of the world, and which has always been the political capital of Egypt. It seems that the victorious general should have established in this city, then unique, the centre of his government. No indeed! The need of change, innate in his race, political

instinct, perhaps also a souvenir full of poesy, decided him to transport elsewhere the capital of the country. He had, a short time before, taken possession of the fortress of Babylone, reared against Mount Mokatam on the right bank of the Nile. This ancient fortress, built by the kings of Persia when they were masters of Egypt, had fallen into his hands without much resistance. Master of this important place, Amru, wishing to pursue his conquests, gave order to break up his camp. But at the moment when, in execution of his orders, they had struck all the tents between the banks of the Nile and the fortress of Babylone, they perceived that a pair of doves had made their nest on the tent of the general. Must we destroy the nest in order to strike the tent? "God forbid," cried Amru, "that a Mussulman refuse his protection to any living thing, a creature of God Almighty, that had placed itself in security under the shelter of His hospitality! Besides, we are still in the month of Moharren, and during this sacred month religion forbids us any act of violence. Let the birds be respected that are become my guests, and let my tent stand where it is till my return from Alexandria!" The tent remained up, it is affirmed, even against any accident. The birds thus protected by the hospitality of Amru reared without trouble their young that were hatched. After the capture of Alexandria, Amru gave a second time the order to break up camp in order to occupy the interior of Egypt.



"Where shall we pitch our new camp?" asked the soldiers of one another. "At the General's tent," they all replied. Thus an accident without importance, but not without mercy, determined the spot of the first Arabian capital in Egypt. They called it *Fostatt*, a word signifying tent, as if the new city was not to be more substantial than the light canvas on which the Arabian imagination was pleased to contemplate the nest of the pair of doves. It was there that Amru fixed his residence, formed grand establishments, and inaugurated the administrative and political organization of the country with a liberality of mind and moderation of conduct, that none of his successors, alas! has been able to imitate.

Fostatt was destined, if not to disappear, since it still partly exists, at least to lose its character of a capital, for the benefit of a new city built beside it. A district of Fostatt, distinct from Fostatt itself, El-Asker, that is to say, "the army," was inhabited by the troops and their officers. There arose under the Abasside caliphs the palace of the military commanders and governors. But the area of this military suburb soon became too small to contain the magazines, the horses, the slaves, and the considerable riches heaped up by Ahmed-êbn-Touloun, the founder of the dynasty of Toulounides. The latter therefore, in his turn, sought for a spot near Fostatt and El-Asker, where he might build a city worthy of himself. An elevated plain, forming the plateau of the abrupt

heights called Mount Yechkar, and which extends to the east of Fostatt, and of the district of El-Asker towards the Mokatam, appeared to him to unite all the conditions he desired. This plain was filled with tombs of Christians and Jews ; it was necessary to destroy them in order to build at first on the space they occupied, a riding school and a citadel. The surrounding land was afterwards distributed in fee to the chiefs of the army, who were to undertake to raise houses on it and come and live in them. Hence the name given by Touloun to the new city, El-Qatayah, which signifies in Arabic, lands conceded by their owners and their suzerains to their vassals or partisans under certain conditions or rents. The splendour of El-Qatayah soon eclipsed that of Fostatt ; magnificent gardens, rich palaces, superb mosques, pleasant private houses, markets, and workshops, etc., embellished it everywhere.

The palace of Ahmed-êbn-Touloun surpassed all the rest in magnificence : the entrance there was by several gates, and one of them was surmounted by a belvidere, whence the view extended afar over Fostatt and its environs, the winding course of the Nile, the verdant isle of Rodah, and over the desert bordered by the Pyramids. It was there that Ahmed-êbn-Touloun, tired of his glorious work, loved to repose himself. From the height of his belvidere, at night, the eve before the fêtes, he surveyed their preparations with an eye at once heedless and benevo-

lent ; if he perceived any of his subjects wanting anything, his generous gifts soon supplied the insufficiency of resources. Khomarouyha, son of Ahmed-êbn-Touloun, succeeded him in his power, in his riches, and in his taste for building. He employed a portion of the treasure, his father had left him, in enlarging and embellishing El-Qatayah. If we may believe the Arabian writers, his palace became a marvel that defied almost the imagination. It was surrounded with immense gardens, where was united everything that could administer to the self-indulgence of an oriental prince. They had found there a means of subduing effectually the heat which is insupportable in Egypt. Thousands of flowers, distributed in parterres, presented to the eye pleasing combinations and poetic passages from the Koran. The trunk of the trees was enveloped in gilded copper, from which projected spouts, forming numerous fountains. Here and there rose immense wooden towers, filled with birds ; kiosks dazzling with gold and azure, ornamented—in spite of the formal precepts of the Koran—with elegant statues wearing crowns of gold, ear-rings of the same metal, and costumes covered with precious stones, and composed of the rarest fabrics, stood before their eyes. An immense menagerie contained all the known ferocious animals : the prince amused himself in watching their combats in the presence of his court. An elevated belvidere permitted him to admire the

splendid spectacle of the Nile, the city, the gardens, the desert, and the Pyramids. But what carried to the last degree of oriental refinement the luxury of this princely residence, was a vast basin of fifty cubits, filled with quicksilver, surrounded with a colonnade of marble, the capitals of which were silver. The light of the sun, of the moon and stars, was reflected in innumerable marvellous tints on this wonderful lake. Silver rings and silken cords raised to the surface an immense cushion inflated with air, upon which the prince permitted himself to be cradled with delight during the warm summer night. Let us not hastily say that all this strange description is an exaggeration : one may still see, close to Cairo, at Shoubra, the baths of Méhémet-Ali, which recall in many respects the enchanted lake of Khomarouyah. "It is," says Gérard de Nerval, who had known them in all their splendour, "an immense basin of white marble, surrounded with columns in the Byzantine style, with a high fountain in the middle, from which water escapes through the mouths of crocodiles. The whole of the interior is lighted with gas, and during summer nights, the pacha glides round the basin in a gilded cange, the oars of which are moved by the ladies of his harem. These beautiful ladies bathe there also, under their master's eye, but in peignoirs of silken crape . . . the Koran, as we know, not permitting the nude figure."

*Quantum mutata!* The baths of Méhémet-Ali

still exist; the basin is still fed through the crocodiles' mouths; the Byzantine colonnade still surrounds it with its elegant forms; but the gilded cange, the oars gently agitated, the ladies discreetly clad in silken crape, and finally the gas-lighting, which set off their mysterious modesty, have all disappeared. The sofas and superb divans upon which reclined Méhémet-Ali, admiring with voluptuousness the spectacle displayed before him, are now pierced by their well-worn springs, and covered with dust. The delightful little boudoirs, canopied with velvet and silk, that surrounded the basin, and where the pacha doubtlessly retired, after having thrown the handkerchief, were now quite musty. Everything passes away; the quicksilver lake of Khomarouyah, that reflected the stars, and the more modern one of Méhémet-Ali, and the silken cushion inflated with air, and the gilded cange! At any rate, the summer nights have preserved in Egypt their transparent brilliancy, and the marvellous harmony of a light which seems still to invite pachas and common mortals to forgetfulness of the world, to dreaming and voluptuousness!

El-Qatayah was to submit to the same fate as Fostatt. When the Fatimite Caliphs took possession of Egypt, they dreamt of founding a new capital, that might rival not merely that of the Toulounides, but even Bagdad, the city of the Abassides. It was to Djouhar, the general who had taken possession of the

country in the name of the Fatimites, that the honour was due for having laid the foundation of Cairo. He selected a vast space, comprising altogether that of Fostatt and that of El-Qatayah, and extending beyond as far as the foot of the Mokatam. According to Eastern custom, they began by digging the ditches of the bounds. The ascension of the planet Mars was to decide the exact moment of the foundation. The Arabian name of Mars, *El-Kaher*, signifies the *Conqueror*. Hence came that of the new city, *Mars-el-Kahirah* (the victorious capital), soon transformed by use into that of *El-Kahirah* (the victorious), from which we have made Cairo.\* "This name had been given to it," say the Oriental writers, "not merely in testimony of the victory which had just been gained by the Fatimites, but also in testimony of those which Heaven would consequently accord them against their enemies. Alas! these latter have not been numerous, and Cairo was going to be oftener

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\* The historians of the Crusades have transformed the name of *El-Kahirah* into that of *Alcaïro*, whence we consequently have *Cairo*. The name of *Mars*, which properly signifies "Capital," though it is applied to all Egypt as well as to its capital, was, however, preserved in *Fostatt*, in joining it to the epithet of *Atyqah* or of *Qadyméh* (ancient); it is this word of *Mars-el-Atyqah* (ancient capital) that travellers have changed into *Old Cairo*, a name *Fostatt* has never borne. Cairo is also called *El-Mahroussah* (the well guarded), because it encloses the tombs of such holy personages, that the city, say the Egyptians, is guarded by their presence alone.

conquered than go on conquering. Are we to see in the legend which the Arabian historians relate on the origin of this city, the augury of a sad future? A remarkable solemnity was prepared for the foundation; the workmen, the materials, were all ready; the astronomers were observing with their instruments the passage of Mars at the meridian; the favourable moment was to be announced by their signal. But in order that this signal might be given instantaneously, cords furnished with bells had been laid along the ditches. Divided, like all wise men, the astronomers could not agree on the precise instant of the passage of Mars. Amidst their disputes, a flight of birds of prey came and pitched on the cords, and caused the given signal to sound. The workmen, deceived, laid the first stones. It was discovered afterwards that the birds of prey had arrived just at the moment that the ascension of the planet Mars took place. But is it quite sure that it was not desired, after the event, to justify the precipitation of the workmen? What is certain is, that a flight of birds of prey has presided at the birth of the new city, a dark presage, which the destinies of Cairo have not absolutely belied!

As we see, it has been necessary to return to it several times before founding the admirable city which is now the capital of Egypt. In a few years it was entirely built; but how many building sovereigns have since contributed to its splendour! The taste

for building appears to be a natural product in Egypt. All the dynasties, all the princes who have succeeded in this country from the first Pharaohs have had it almost to the same degree. Among these princes, however, some have been admirable architects, whilst others have hardly been worthy of the name of masons. Amru, Touloun, Djouhar, Hassan, etc., Kart Bey especially, the greatest of all, will ever merit the admiration, the gratitude, and the love of artists. They have raised at Cairo public buildings of exquisite grace, at present almost completely ruined, but whose *débris* still present wonders that one is never tired of contemplating. Alas ! the last master of Egypt, Ismaïl Pacha, was himself also a great builder. They are indebted to him for about thirty palaces, as many barracks hardly distinguishable from palaces, hundreds of public establishments, houses, schools, mosques, hospitals, etc. Millions of francs have been expended on these works—ugly, heavy, and vulgar ! When one reflects that with the half, the quarter, of the sums thus wasted, it would have been easy to restore the ancient mosques, to shore up the crumbling walls of the Tombs of the Caliphs, to support the marvellous ceilings that are falling to the ground, to save the mosque of the Sultan Hassan, of which every day carries away a shred—one cannot help taking it to heart. The Turks are the least artistic race that ever lived. Méhémet-Ali, Abbas Pacha, Sard Pacha, Ismaïl Pacha,



have built more walls than almost all their predecessors united : but what walls, ye Gods ! And yet if one of them had had the ingenious idea to make an Arab palace, the mosques, the private houses, the public establishments would have supplied him with materials in abundance. He would have found everywhere wainscoting gracefully carved, ceilings of exquisite colour and design, *moucharabiehs* more delicately worked than the most delicate lace. But they have suffered to be dispersed the treasures they had gathered together with so little trouble, in order to purchase, at ridiculous, ruinous prices, European frippery, with which they have filled their harems and palaces.

Beside, the true Cairo is rising now a new city, which bears the name of Ismaïlieh, and which in fact was built under Ismaïl Pacha. It is the European quarter. There is there an Italian opera, a French theatre, a circus twice as large as that of the Champs Elysées, wide boulevards, not paved, but lighted with gas, immense hotels, very heavy, and the Esbekieh Gardens, formerly one of the wonders of the East, at present the finest *Parc Monceau* in the world. This quarter reminds one of Passy and the environs of the Bois de Boulogne. It is composed of a series of elegant houses, though often of rather bad taste, surrounded with little, cool, shady, gardens. There, one enjoys the open air, the verdure, the light, the flowers, and all that one may enjoy in the suburbs of Paris during the hottest summer days. But is that really

Egypt? Is it not rather that country without character which a semi-European civilization has brought into existence on the banks of the Nile? A few amateurs and artists only have been able to create for themselves in this vulgar spot real Oriental residences. A French architect, M. Baudry, brother of the painter of the green-room of the Opera of Paris, has built for himself a charming house in the purest Arabic style, which is now one of the curiosities of Cairo. His drawing-room, the ceiling of which is delightful, forms a real Arab museum. The tempered light from the stained glass spreads the finest shades. M. Baudry has also constructed for a French banker, M. Delort, an Arabian house, which is quite a *chef-d'œuvre*. It should be visited if one would have a complete idea of an art, the original remains of which are gradually disappearing. A third Frenchman, M. de Saint Maurice, whose collections had been exhibited at the retrospective exhibition, has undertaken a house more considerable than the two preceding, and which, when finished, will be a model of Arabic restoration. But setting aside these three exceptions, the Italian style is the most common that has presided at all the constructions of Ismaïlieh. When one promenades in the narrow lanes, dark, but so original, of *Fostatt*; when one dreams of the vanished splendours of *El-Qatayah*; when one closely examines what remains of the mosques and palaces of Cairo, and when afterwards, one finds himself again in the presence of barracks

and factories raised by the dynasty of Méhémet-Ali, how is it possible not to deplore the inconstancy and carelessness of the Arabs, who have allowed to fall into the brutal hands of the Turks so many precious relics? Under any other climate than that of Egypt, there would remain nothing of these poems in stone, which the most delicate fancy has created, and which the most supine inertia permits to crumble away bit by bit! Happily, an atmosphere always dry, a sky always clear, still preserves of them numerous *débris*.\* But they are so buried under the dust, so covered with rust and dirt, that one can decipher them only with difficulty, like those manuscripts upon which time has deposited a thick layer, and which permits to be seen merely fragments without connection or consequence. Obligated by its religion to renounce sculpture and painting, in no way gifted with musical talents, the Arab race appears to have concentrated all its genius on poetry and architecture, in which it has excelled.

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\* Alas! this is true only in part. If the climate of Cairo is preservative, on the other hand, man destroys everything there with a singular wilfulness. The public buildings, the Arab houses, are falling down all around. The natives have taken to living in the European fashion, *à la franco*, as they say. They thoughtlessly destroy what recalls to them the past, and erect in their place buildings in the Italian style, but of the most detestable taste. Soon, perhaps, almost nothing will remain of Arabian Cairo. It is not very likely the European conquest that has extended over the country will arrest a movement plainly inevitable.

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But strangely limited in its flight, incapable of doing anything that was not spontaneous, always ready to abandon the work of to-day to launch into some new adventure, it has quickly exhausted the series of conceptions of which it was capable ; decadence has not been backward in making a beginning and, once begun, it stops no more. The history of Cairo might be considered as the emblem of the historical development of a race. This city, many times abandoned and recommenced, contains here and there admirable relics, but covered with shapeless constructions void of taste—work unconnected, unfinished, objectless, planless, and without tradition, including every style from the purest to the most vulgar—is a living image to the Arabian genius. This is the reason that it offers an inexhaustible subject of observation to the moralist and philosopher, as well as a perpetual incentive to admiration to the poet and the artist.

## CHAPTER V.

### CAIRO.—CONTINUED.

THE central point of the European quarter of Cairo is the Esbekieh Gardens, painted by Marilhat, described by Chateaubriand, Gérard de Nerval, Maxime Du Camp, Théophile Gautier, Edmond About, Charles Blanc, etc. General Bonaparte had established there his staff and his personal residence. One still sees there the house where Kléber was assassinated. It is the only souvenir, a little old, that has survived the numerous transformations that have fallen to the lot of the Esbekieh Gardens. After having been a kind of lake surrounded with shady avenues, after having passed through a score of metamorphoses, which however, have not destroyed its oriental character, it has become simply an English garden, designed moreover, with taste, and which will be admirable when the new trees planted there will have acquired their full development. Certain of these trees brought from the centre of Africa by Dr. Schweinfurt are the delight already of naturalists ; but the poets regret the old sycamores which were reflected on the waters

of the disappeared lake. Théophile Gautier has left us a complete description of the picture of Marilhat which represented the Esbekieh Gardens. This picture, says he, "was of an incredible ferocity of colour. Under a sky of raw blue, the ultramarine of which was turned into indigo, were cut out two immense trees of the species *Mimosa nilotica*, with a monstrous stump, that one might have fancied to have been made with a bundle of twisted boles, and branches which were themselves enormous trunks forming queer crooked turns and bearing masses of foliage enough to cover a forest. These two trees alone occupied almost the whole canvas, and under the shade they projected, were perceived in the bluish obscurity a *sakkieh* worked by buffaloes, a woman with a pitcher of water on her head, several persons squatting, and an Arab perched on a camel. Further towards the left, the Arabian houses that border the Gardens leant against each other in all that free and easy Oriental style, with their *moucharabiehs*, their overhanging stories, their corbelling sustained by posts, and all the characteristic details that had not yet been lopped and trimmed by progress—the friend of straight lines and plain surfaces. A palm raised over the houses its plume of leaves, and behind the trees, under the arch of their foliage, was perceived another range of buildings forming the background of the Gardens and surmounted by a minaret. On the right were depicted the escarpments of Mokatam. A

terrible, blinding light was cast aslant, like spoonfuls of melted lead, on the whole of the foreground."

It was not at the hour of mid-day perhaps, that the ancient Esbekieh was presented to the eye in its most smiling and oriental aspect: it was in the evening, especially on the last days of the Ramadan and during the fête of the *Dosseh*, when thousands of lights rendered sparkling the water of the lake, upon which floated barks bearing torches, whilst the sycamores and the *Mimosa nilotica* spread a shade prudent, private, and deep, around that gay and luminous spectacle. All that is no more! the sycamores and the *Mimosa nilotica* have been felled, the lake has been transformed into a simple pond where swans and ducks swim as in the Jardin d'Acclimatation, the fairy-like illuminations are extinguished, the Arabian houses have given places to European mansions, and the *moucharabiehs* and the corbels have crumbled into dust. The Esbekieh has, nevertheless, a seductive charm. In spite of the regularity of its masses of foliage and its lawns, it has nothing of that terrible monotony of our public gardens. The light of the East gives from trees, houses, and kiosks the most ordinary, delicious reflections.

How many times in the morning, at break of day, have I not contemplated from the avenues of the Esbekieh, the depth of a transparent sky, upon which the verdure of the shrubberies is projected so harmo-

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niously ! Eagles, vultures, hawks, griffons, turned over my head at giddy heights ; but the sky was so clear above them, that infinite spaces seemed to extend still beyond the regions where they appeared like a black spot upon an intense blue infinity. Nothing is vulgar under the sun of the East. The Opera, the theatres, the mansions of Ismaïl Pacha bathed in a dazzling atmosphere take an inexpressible aspect, almost elegant. It must be admitted, however, that the garden of the Esbekieh is much disdained by the inhabitants of Cairo. It is in vain that the band of the Viceroy plays there every day the airs from *Aida*, alternating with refrains from the *Mère Angot*. This Frank music attracts but a few nursemaids who, contrary to the customs of Europe, are unaccompanied by any soldier. In the evening only the Arabian cafés are furnished with a certain number of guests. You may then see gliding slyly through the avenues, veiled women followed at a distance by a few students of the Mosque El-Azar, in long robes of diverse colours, a few clerks of the public offices in Stambouline and in tarbouche with a European shirt carefully starched, but not adorned with any cravat according to the custom of the country.

The Arabian cafés surrounded with little red flags, lighted with lanterns and Venetian lamps, filled with women, to whom the habarah gives the look of nuns or mysterious spirits, are numerous in the Esbekieh. A band composed of a player on the



tarabook,\* a player on a kind of mandolin, a player on a sort of guitar, and a singer who was screaming in the most extraordinary way in keeping one hand tightly pressed on his cheek, gave out strange music, often interesting from the difficulty overcome, but almost unintelligible to European ears. As to the Arabs, the enthusiasm with which this singular music inspires them is excessive. They have quite a way of their own in expressing it. Placed beside the orchestre they interrupt it at every turn by an *Ah!* plaintive and prolonged, which seems at first a part of the piece being executed, and to form a recommencement of the chorus, but which in fact is but a mark of approbation, a mere manner of applauding. The true dilettanti pronounced this *ah!* in raising the head with an expression almost doleful; their note of approbation produces on us a harrowing effect. Every nation has its manner of expressing gaiety! The Arabs comprehend no more our music than we theirs. One should see with what conscience the Khedive's musicians mangle the finest melodies of *Aida* before empty chairs. During the expedition to Egypt the army of Bonaparte vainly tried to make the natives feel the beauty of our military airs; the air of Marlborough alone succeeded in securing their approval. "Qui sait quand reviendra" tickled

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\* The Tarabook is a simple earthenware vase, one orifice of which is covered with a skin, forming a sort of tambour.

rather pleasantly, it appears, Arabian ears, without one ever knowing why. But the air of Marlborough itself is not for them worth the interminable national melopæias, which float indefinitely in the evening under the shade of the Esbekieh, whilst the women raising slowly their habarah puff the smoke from a narghilly, and then—must it be confessed—consume a score of *bocks* like the vulgarest frequenters of the Parisian boulevards.

The hotel where I lodged, the New Hotel, situated on the Esbekieh, was a post of observation, well chosen, to view the interminable file of original types and costumes that strike the eye of the traveller just arrived in Egypt. At the door of the hotel dragoons of every nationality, Greeks, Copts and Nubians wearing the fez, dressed in a little braided vest and large trousers, laced, offer their services to the new comers : little negroes, Abyssinians, with eyes of the gazelle, clad in short robes, their arms and legs naked, offer themselves as messengers, as guides, or as shoe-blacks ; cawas of the consulate, richly dressed, carry proudly a scimitar at their side, and flourish their long canes with golden heads ; dealers of all kinds spread before the eyes of their customers couffiehs, ostrich feathers, antiquities, more or less genuine, boxes and carpets ; farther on, magnificent Arabs mounted on their camels defile solemnly amidst fellahs in blue skirts ; fine young Copts, in black turbans, trotting on their Egyptian asses, whose easy

step contrasts so strongly with the embarrassed jerk of their European brethren ; women wrapped up in a long mantle, their faces hidden under a veil, showing merely their feet, in satin shoes of the most flaunting colours, mix in this motley crowd ; finally, carriages of the harem, going at full speed, preceded by two *saïs*, and followed by two eunuchs galloping heavily on splendid horses, cleave the human wave. Nothing is prettier, more graceful than these *saïs*, a sort of outriders, who trot before the cavaliers and carriages armed with a long stick, and who shout clamorously : " Look out ! Run away ! To the right ! To the left ! Make way ! Make way ! " Most of them are Nubians or Abyssinians. Their black heads, in which glare great almond-shaped eyes, are charming for sharpness and liveliness. Their costume is attractive, and has only the defect of resembling a little too much a costume of the Opéra Comique ; it appears to recall that of the boatman of the Bosphorus, but with more elegance and taste, composed of a velvet waistcoat, richly embroidered with gold or embellished with silk lace, displaying the prettiest arabesques ; of a large belt, the ends of which float on the wind ; of white breeches, which finish at the knee, leaving bare a blackish leg of astonishing firmness and nervous suppleness ; of a superb tarbouche stuck on the top of the head, from which escapes a blue tassel, falling to the middle of the back ; and last, of a gauze shirt of immaculate

whiteness, whose long sleeves slashed to the elbow and turned up to the shoulder, seem to be a pair of wings : it forms an *ensemble*, the description of which could give no adequate idea of its lightness and gracefulness. Thus dressed, the *sais* run, or rather fly, around the cavaliers and carriages with inconceivable swiftness. They are not contented with going straight before them ; they form curves ; they wander in every direction ; they leap and caper, yelling at the same time, like dogs accustomed to go twice and thrice the distance of the carriages they accompany. Nothing ever tires them. I have seen some who, after having done forty miles of this terrible march, appeared less exhausted than the horses, whose paces they unceasingly surpass. In truth, almost all the *sais* die young ; at thirty they are knocked up, at forty they succumb to a disease of the lungs. But during this short existence they lead the life of sylphs, always frisky and fluttering, and when they fall harassed with fatigue, it is not without having tasted to the end the charm of a perpetual agitation: they have only just set their foot on earth to rebound as quickly into space and to overcome it.\*

The contrast with the eunuchs, who follow with

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\* The institution of the *sais* dates from the Mamelukes. Every mounted Mameluke was accompanied by a runner, who bore his arms, picked them up when they fell in the combat, and glided under the bellies of the enemies' horses in order to hamstring them. At present the *sais* are less warlike, but they are not less nimble, nor less spirited than formerly.

a heavy step the carriages which the *saïs* outstrip with so much alertness, is most comic. Poor eunuchs ! Never have creatures, uglier, heavier, and more ungainly, served as a set-off to the population of a city, composed of superb Arabs, of fellahs equally robust, of negroes imposing by their vigour and their well-balanced powers. One may see hundreds of them at the doors of the harems or in the public promenades with their fan-shape ears, hanging lips, greasy face, and body puffed with corpulency. Some turn in their fat hands the eternal chapelet of the Orientals ; others knit regularly a stocking, the worsted passed around the neck, in the most singular attitude, their dark and shapeless mass can assume. In Egypt the greater part of women's work is done by men. One may see continually in the shops of the laundresses enormous negroes seriously occupied in ironing white shirts, whose colour sets off all the more their own. One remembers the impression produced in one of our last *salons* by a little picture of M. Bonnat, who represented a black barber spreading on the chin of a customer, not less black, a lather of soap of dazzling whiteness. How many pictures of the same kind, how many similar effects, are met with at each step in the streets of Cairo ! The most original fancies have nothing compared with reality, and the barber of M. Bonnat would be surprised to see the knitter, the ironer, or the negro baker, of whom Egypt offers thousands of specimens.

Amidst the procession that passes before the mansions of Esbekieh, hurry on a troop of little girls, carrying on their heads a strange basket, with their hands and arms covered up to the elbow with a kind of greenish glove, the matter of which it is made being difficult to ascertain. There is little wood in Egypt ; but if it is not very necessary to warm oneself there, it is at least necessary to cook. They use for that a kind of cake composed of straw and—How shall I express it ? In short, when a carriage passes and leaves behind some trace of the horse, the little girls with green gloves rush almost under the wheels, hustle about one another, throw in their faces the strangest projectiles, and seize mutually a booty, which to them, like the gold to that Roman emperor who extracted it from the public dung-heaps, appeared to have no odour. What is extraordinary, is that if, in consequence of these desperate struggles, a little girl happens to roll into the dust and plunge her hand into a dirty rut, she quickly retires it with an air of inexpressible disgust. Cleanliness also is a thing quite relative ! Every nation understands it in its own way. When the gathering is finished, the product is laid out on the open ground ; it is carefully kneaded, whilst mixing it with the refuse of straw ; they make light cakes with it, which they take daintily in the hollow of the hand and throw against the wall of the house, where they stick. All the fellahs' houses are thus covered with a layer of cake, which the sun

dries ; they then fall and form an excellent combustible. We must not complain of the little cake girls. With the dogs and the vultures they maintain the cleanliness of Cairo, which without that and without the sun, would be uninhabitable. A great number of fellahs have no other shelter than the footways of Esbekieh and the road that leads to the bridge of Kasr-el-Nil. Whatever weather it may be, whether the sky be cloudy or clear, the atmosphere cold or suffocating, they may be seen in the evening rolling themselves up like a ball in the sole covering that serves them for dress, to arrange themselves along the walls, where they remain slumbering till morning. This series of human balls, over which one always risks to stumble, presents a strange aspect. When day breaks everyone creeps out from under his covering and commences a toilet, the simplest and most summary. It consists merely of a minute hunt, carried out in the covering ; men, women, and children go at it, all at once, and during the operation the rays of the rising sun form their sole costume. God knows what remains immediately after these toilets on the footways of Esbekieh and the bridge of Kasr-el-Nil ! But half an hour later, the stray dogs of the city, the vultures, the burning heat of the sun have accomplished their sanitary work, and one may then circulate, without risk, over these improvised dormitories, the maintenance of which costs so little.

About one in the afternoon, when the travellers

from the hotels finish their *déjeuner*, the Nubian dancers, the wrestlers, the psylls, the jugglers arrive in a band to exercise their diverse trades. The psylls have been too often described for me to speak of them again. It is known that they have the faculty of discovering serpents that hide in the houses and gardens, and drawing them to them by an invincible charm. They appear to live with the serpents in perfect intimacy. They make use of them to execute a variety of tricks. The most common of all consists in stiffening a viper by pressing its head so as to render it as inflexible as a stick. This case of simple catalepsy is renewed without end. According to my travelling companion, the naturalist, Aaron was merely an ordinary psyll; he only squeezed the serpents' heads to turn them into sticks, to the great wonder of an ignorant and credulous Pharaoh. Heaven help me from accepting this explanation, quite natural, however, of a miracle so well established as that of Aaron! The Nubian dancers are curious; they have the head covered with a hat of plumes, in the middle of which shines a mirror, which happens to fall over the forehead, and which, with a simple blue tunic, constitutes their entire costume. But they wear also around the waist a large belt of shells of mussels, which makes at every movement a dry screaming noise. The Nubian dancer does not move his legs; he twists his loins in taking the most significant postures; now and then only he



leaps to execute a cut, which would have a great success with a single dancer of the "Closerie des Lilas." The black face of the dancer, his teeth of ivory, his smile, which is not wanting in artifice, give to this monotonous dance a character of singular vivacity. The noise of the mussels' shells clashing together mixes with the sharp notes of a sort of harp, variegated all over with ostrich feathers, which another Nubian plays most energetically, whilst the dancer assumes his flexible postures and goes through his jerking movements.

Since the day of my arrival in Cairo, without going beyond the Esbekieh Gardens, I had thus seen the Arabian cafés, the *sais*, the carriages of the harems, the eunuchs, the out-door dormitories, the dancers, the psylls, etc. In the evening, at the approach of night, I permitted myself to saunter into the narrow alleys and lanes of the real Cairo. After having gone along the Mousky, the ancient principal street of the Frank district, lined on each side by European shops, I lost myself amidst narrow blind alleys and dark lanes, returning ever to the same spot, where light shadows seemed to glide warily along the walls. At certain distances an Arabian café, feebly lighted, where a dozen men, squatting on willow benches, were enjoying supinely the narghilly, whilst the screaming notes of an orchestra were charming their ears, threw a little light into this demi-obscurity. It was with difficulty

if one saw, and then only at the turns of certain streets, the star-spangled firmament, so elevated are the houses, and so entirely closed in are they, over the heads of the passers, by corbels, balconies, and *moucharabiehs*. A few little lanterns suspended here and there lighted up only dimly. It was only near the Arab shops that the street was well lighted. There, great lanterns set off the brilliant tints of the fruit and vegetables of all kinds—oranges, lemons, water-melons, apples, mad-apples, etc., spread out before the eyes of the customer. All the fruits have in Egypt a warmer colour than in Europe, which gives to the fruiterers' shops, especially when lighted up at night, a colouring exceedingly brilliant. Gradually, I penetrated into the most diverse quarters. At one moment even, I passed through one of rather suspicious appearance. At every door women crouching around little fires, clad in green, red, or yellow low-bodied robes, exhibiting the most varied complexions, although all more or less dark, were questioning in incomprehensible terms the young Egyptians passing proudly on their asses amidst this crowd of blackamores. Other women were swinging above from their windows immense variegated lanterns. The cafés became more and more numerous. The moment had come for me to beat a retreat. On my return to the Esbekieh Gardens, the Oriental moonlight gave to every object an intensity of light that electricity would not easily rival.

The moonlights of Egypt are marvellous ; they have at the same time extraordinary brilliancy and softness. The mist, in which are bathed the trees, the gardens, the houses, and public buildings, is so pure that their outlines and forms appear a hundred-fold clearer than by day. It is by moonlight that one should see the Pyramids, the tombs of the Caliphs, and the Mosque of Hassan ; it is by moonlight that one ought to admire, from the summit of the Citadel, Cairo slumbering on the banks of the Nile, whose course meanders along its walls like a vast sheet of silver. He who has not felt the charm of such a spectacle, knows not the poesy of luminous shadows, soft lights, and the mysteries of the night !

## CHAPTER VI.

### CAIRO.—CONTINUED.

DAYBREAK in Egypt has not those successive and graduated tints that one admires in the South of France. The sun lights all at once the edge of the sky. Hardly announced by a rose glimmering, it bursts suddenly on the horizon and sets in a few moments the whole atmosphere ablaze. Sometimes, however, in winter, and oftener perhaps than one might suppose, it has to raise, before showing itself, the long folds of a greyish mantle that cover the earth all around. The soil of Egypt, watered and heated at the same time, impregnated with the water of the Nile to its full depth, always in evaporation, and having light vapours continually escaping, is covered in the morning with a kind of transparent haze, which reminds one at first sight of the fogs of Paris. But as soon as the red disc of the sun appears over the Mokatam Hill, this thick veil is rent in every direction ; in an hour, at most, the humidity of the air is absorbed ; it is barely if a few flakes of cloud, tinted by the breaking day, are still floating over

the blue of the firmament. Except during the period of the Kamsin, when the air is charged with a reddish dust that the wind perpetually stirs up and never disperses, the rays of the sun pierce rapidly the atmosphere; the coolness and humidity of the night give place, as if by enchantment, to the dryness and the limpidity of the day.

It is at the foot of the Mosque of Méhémet-Ali, and the terrace of the Citadel, that it is so fine to see the break of day over still half-slumbering Cairo. It is impossible to render the effect of a panorama which is then presented to the sight; it is unquestionably one of the finest in the world, one of those especially that awakens in the mind the most souvenirs, whilst it produces on the feelings the liveliest sensations. I have never understood the kind of scepticism that inspires certain persons with a desire to separate themselves from historical impressions in order to contemplate the spectacle of nature with a complete disinterestedness. *Homo sum!* and it is not at all indifferent to me to perceive on the horizon the Pyramids of Sakkarah projecting their indistinct forms beside the forest of palms that covers the ruins of Memphis, whilst nearer, at the junction of the verdure and the sand, the great Pyramids, feebly tinted by the rising sun, seem to be the mysterious guardians of the desert. It was in this half-verdant plain spreading out to the view from the Citadel of Cairo, that human civilization was born. On the right appears the

country of Heliopolis, the City of the Sun, where the sages of Greece came to imbibe the principles of that philosophy which, transformed by their genius, impregnated with their imagination, and propagated by their eloquence, has become the leaven of human thought, the germ of all science, of every doctrine and every art. A single obelisk, surrounded by hills of reddish sand, marks the spot where it stood ; it is hardly distinguishable at the distance where we are from the gigantic sycamore, under the shade of which, according to an antique legend, the Holy Family tarried a long while in its flight into Egypt. Still nearer, the green shades of Shoubrah are about to join again Cairo, which the course of the Nile, with its yellowish waters, its banks bordered with date trees and sycamores, surrounds with its majestic and poetic girdle. On the banks of the river, Boolak lifts to the sky its cupolas and minarets ; the isle of Rodah, brilliant with flowers and verdure, and the smiling fields of Gizèh, spread out as far as the Lybian desert, quite rosy at the break of day, but of a rose pale and diaphanous, with bluish demi-tints. An immense aqueduct, situated at Old Cairo, almost opposite the Pyramids, traverses a series of sand-hills, of cupolas partly thrown down, windmills, and ruins of all kinds. This part of the picture presents an aspect of bareness and dryness, which would be dispiriting if the play of light and shade did not give it an intensity of extraordinary life. But what attracts the eye beyond all is

the city itself of Cairo, gracefully raised in the foreground ; the dark and colossal Mosque of the Sultan Hassan stands out at once in the variegated background of the houses, palaces, and mosques ; beyond it is a forest, an indescribable confusion of buildings, the glaring colours of which dazzle the sight. An incessant murmur rises from the streets and other places of Cairo. In the evening, at sunset, the colours are still more brilliant. A vast blood-red curtain sets off the dark mass of the Pyramids of Gizèh ; the tops of the palms and sycamores appear gilded ; the desert, far yonder, passes through every gradation of grey, blue, violet, and opal. On the Nile the white sails of the dahabiehs resemble the wings of great swans spreading their plumage over the water ; the noise of the city has become so intense that it seems almost like the rolling of distant thunder. It is thus that Cairo should be contemplated morning and night, and if one would admire it freely and inspire himself deeply with the poesy of this wonderful city, that history, art, and nature have done everything to embellish.

But the hour is come to descend the Citadel and to lose oneself in the streets. A score of donkey-drivers present themselves to ask you to ride. Refuse without hesitation, and go on at random until you imperiously feel the desire to enter your hotel. Then, wherever you may be, in whatever unlikely quarter your walk by chance may have led you, you may be

sure of meeting again a great number of donkey-drivers screaming with all their might : "*Bourriquet, Monsieur, very good ! Bourriquet ! Donkey ! Bourriquet !*" After descending the long boulevard which begins at the Mosque of Sultan Hassan, you arrive at the Place Méhémet-Ali, a great bare space, bordered on one side by Arabian ruins having a very picturesque effect, on the other by vulgar European constructions of a very dull aspect. In the middle of the square stands the equestrian statue of the founder of the Egyptian dynasty—a manifest violation of the precept of the Koran that forbids the reproduction of the human figure. But what does it matter ? They are not quite so particular in Egypt. Bronze-coloured Arabs, dressed in blue robes and white turbans, are seated round the pedestal of the statue. They form a splendid group, such as a painter would rejoice to reproduce. But the painters would have enough to do if they would reproduce all the pictures that are unceasingly offered to their brush in the streets of Cairo. At every step many in the style of those of Gérôme, Fromentin, and Pasini, are met with. Here, it is a handsome negro majestically sitting down before a few beans which he sells to the first comer, or before a handkerchief filled with sand on which he is tracing some cabalistic signs to tell the fortunes of the passer-by ; there, an elegant fellah woman, her eyebrows fully painted, eyes sparkling, with full neck and shoulders escaping from her blue



chemise, who is bearing on her head a basket filled with oranges whilst holding four on her raised hand, as in the pictures of Monsieur Landelle\* ; further on, an Arab, proudly seated on his camel, advancing amidst the crowd that opens noisily to let him pass ; along the streets, in shops of Liliputian dimensions, which seem to be made expressly to serve as a frame to a *scène de genre*, a dealer with grave countenance, with a large gilt turban and long black robe, is turning slowly his chapelet in his emaciated hands, or smoking with dignified air an interminable narghilly. The composition of these living pictures is finished ; it would be sufficient, in order to execute an exquisite work, to transfer it to the canvas by a photographic process ; but how transfer, even with the most magical brush, the marvellous brilliancy of the colours under the reflections of a powerful light ? Art of the highest perfection could not equal here the richness of nature !

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\* The orange-dealers of Cairo, and particularly those who station themselves in the Esbekieh Gardens, are much celebrated for their elegance. A few of them even are very handsome, though, it must be admitted, they form the minority. A great number are met with in the day time ; in the evening many still are seen, but then they have no longer a basket of oranges on their heads. These who indulge in these late promenades are much despised by their companions ; not precisely on account of the promenade, for the lower-class women lose nothing in estimation by these peripatetic propensities ; but the orange dealers do not consider it fair to follow two trades at once. It is the plurality of offices that is scandalous.

On leaving the square of Méhémet-Ali, you enter into the Mousky, the principal street of the old Frank quarter, and, as the guides say, the Rue de Rivoli of Cairo. But what a strange and charming Rue de Rivoli! Covered with a ceiling partly fallen down, the sun's rays penetrate there through a thousand fissures and fall on a crowd, the densest, noisiest, and most medley that ever swarmed in so narrow a space. The houses, very high, furnished with all sorts of balconies and corbels, painted in an endless variety of shades, increase still more the variety of colouring. Calèches conducted by drivers in Oriental costume, Arabian riders, shopkeepers mounted on asses, fellahs perched on camels, black, white, yellow, and copper-coloured people, women, children, eunuchs, mix together and jostle one another with incredible agility. The art with which the native coachmen conduct great carriages through such a crowd is quite a wonder. They never touch in passing, even when they turn at a sharp angle in the streets singularly narrow, even when they pass amidst, without overturning them, a dozen little hawkers with their almond cakes, their dates, and their preserves spread out on the road before them. A Parisian coachman would smash everything, and inevitably, since the Mousky is not paved any more than are the other streets of Cairo; and, besides, at every moment coaches fall into deep ruts, from which they rebound with zig-zags that are terrible enough for their occupiers. But the native

coachmen have extraordinary patience and dexterity. The foot-passengers, besides, exercise their own. One may constantly see children crossing under the horse's chest, escaping from under the wheels on the point of crushing them, and avoid by a dexterous movement being run over by a rider at full gallop. If by chance one of them is thrown down, provided he is not completely disabled, he gets up instantly and flees for his life, for fear of getting a good drubbing ; for, in Egypt, it is not the driver who is responsible for having run over a pedestrian, it is the pedestrian who is to blame for allowing himself to be crushed. I remember a young scamp who used to amuse himself in making game of a carriage in the Mousky ; at the moment he tried to effect his retreat, horse and carriage passed over his body. I thought he was killed ; on looking round, I saw him get up slowly on his feet, play the same trick over again with the carriage, and decamp in another direction with the fleetness of a greyhound, cleaving the crowd who had gathered around the spot of his accident, *nequid in turba*, as Cicero said.

Never has a museum of human types offered a collection so varied, so complete, so picturesque as the Mousky. The Turk, in tarbouche, wrapped in the unsightly stambouline, there elbows the naked fellah in a simple shirt of blue cotton ; the Bedouin, in white turban draped in a white robe, a great black mantle on his shoulder, passes there the wild-looking Arnaut

in vest red or grey, his pistols at his girdle and his mustachios proudly turned up; the Arab of Sinai, clothed in rags composed of thousands of little shreds, not one of which is larger than the thumb, there passes beside Nubians, negroes from Sennaar as black as night, Mogrhebians, Abyssinians, Berbers, etc.; Nubian women, hardly covered with a light rag that reveals the finished beauty of their figure, there show their hideous heads placed by a caprice of nature on admirable bodies, their crisp and greasy hair, their fiery eyes and flat noses, one nostril of which is adorned with a bead of coral. Every colour from ebony-black to albino-white, every race, every costume teems to the astonished eye. I do not speak of English in helmets wrapped in long veils, Jews, French, Italians, Corsicans, Greeks, Russians, Germans, and every possible and imaginable European variety. The native women ride on asses like great bundles; one distinguishes merely their yellow or white *pantalons*, bordered with lace, and their rose, blue or pearl-grey boots. The fellah women, their heads charged with heavy loads, their faces hardly veiled, their figures slight and erect, spangle this immense human wave, where all is movement, brilliancy of colour, noise, and agitation. The public street-waterers, in laying the dust, inundate, without crying, "Look out!" the feet of the people walking by. They carry on their backs an immense leathern bottle, formed with the entire skin of a goat. A slight pres-

sure makes a long stream spurt out, which turns into mud the dust of the Mousky. Other water-carriers have, instead of the buck's skin, a great earthenware urn, terminating in a little neck. They are for the most part hired by charitable souls in order to quench the wayfarer's thirst. For a small pittance they walk about all day with the urn and a cup from which anyone may drink as he likes; ambulating Wallace fountains, certainly quite as useful as ours in Paris.

When one is tired of the Mousky, he takes any road right or left, and is soon lost in Cairo. These lanes are so narrow, that the *moucharabiehs* of the houses on each side almost touch and close, as I have already said, in a demi-vault over the wayfarers' heads. The *moucharabiehs*, as is known, are a kind of balconies, or rather cages, composed of trellis-work projecting over the external walls, and formed with an endless number of little bits of cedar-wood, turned and laid over each other, producing by their assemblage the most varied designs. The *moucharabieh* has the advantage of permitting a view over the outside without allowing from the outside any undesirable prying into the interior of the house; it gives access, through its innumerable interstices, to a light current of air that tempers the heat of the day; and it sifts the light whose varied play enhances the fancifulness of the arabesques on the ceilings or the inscriptions along the interior walls. When the *moucharabieh* is situated in the full sun at the hour of setting, nothing

is more delicate, more mysterious, more fairy-like than the rays that pierce its fine and capricious lace-work ; it is a golden dust on which is depicted the most fantastic forms. Seen from the street, the *moucharabieh* has still an extreme elegance ; but generally it is so old, so worn, that one cannot touch it without risk of its falling to pieces.

The further one advances into the lanes of Cairo, the more one is struck with the strangeness of these narrow labyrinths—dirty and yet charming. Quite half of the city is composed of ruins, from which vultures and eagles, gravely perched on a pile of stones or a heap of mud, take wing at the sound of the wanderer's foot. Most of the houses being built with dried earth or brick, the rain, when it happens to fall, demolishes them partially or totally. Then the cracked walls expose to view ceilings, formerly exquisite in design and colour, shapeless ruins, broken beams, and shattered *moucharabiehs*. No one ever dreams of clearing away the rubbish ; he goes further off to raise a new house. Wretched families dig themselves out a hovel amid the fallen materials ; there they live in company with straying dogs and birds of prey in the most horrible promiscuousness. Here are, however, convents of dervishes quite covered with elegant inscriptions, dark and dilapidated okkels, red and white mosques, fountains of marvellous style. Here and there, a few heads of palms, a few acacias wave above the walls. One arrives

gradually in the traders' district and among the bazaars.

The bazaars of Cairo have been described scores of times, but they defy a complete description. They are long corridors covered with a ceiling, where a considerable crowd is always moving. Carriages cannot pass there, but one adventures on an ass, although very often one may, by extending his arms, touch the walls on each side. A series of little shops, low and narrow, kinds of squares, at most, no higher than the human figure and no wider than high, are filled with the most costly wares. Each bazaar is limited to a special business. There is the bazaar of the money-changers; they may be seen squatting before great strong coffers that contain all imaginable kinds of money; there is the bazaar of the goldsmiths, the bazaar of the perfumers, the bazaar of the papooch dealers, the bazaar of coppersmiths, the bazaar of tarbouches, the carpet bazaars, etc. The principal bazaar, the Khan-Khalil, includes the principal merchandise; it is there may be found admirable strong chests, carpets that are marvels of ornamentation, magnificent Arabian jewellery, Persian porcelain of great beauty, etc. I must confess, however, that the stock of articles really remarkable has been partially exhausted these last few years by a certain number of amateurs and men of taste, who have immoderately raised the price of everything good. You must not be in a hurry if you would make your purchases on good terms at the

Khan-Khalil. The Arabs are ignorant of the adage, "Time is money." When you enter the bazaars many a trader will ask you to sit down near his shop, to take some coffee, and sometimes, if advantageous, to smoke there a narghilly. He will show you afterwards his merchandise. Take care not to be enraptured with it ; it is with the coolest indifference that you should ascertain the price of what happens to please you most ; if you are even quite sure that one will ask you five or six times the value, you should reply by a series of "*La ! la ! la ! la !*" rising shriller and shriller, which will give the measure of your astonishment and indignation, and which means "No ! no ! no ! no !" more negatively. The bargaining thus begun will last five or six days. After many hours of rest passed at the Khan-Khalil, and innumerable cups of coffee sipped with an air of indifference, and interminable discussions engaged in with the dealer, you will finally arrive at obtaining from him reasonable terms. It will be the opportunity to exclaim : "*Taib ! Taib !*" "Very good ! Very good !" and carry off your acquisition. Patience, the taste for long haggling at the threshold of a shop in view of the agreeable sight of the bazaar, the love of coffee and verbose phrases, are the first virtues of Egyptian purchasers. In this strange country, nothing is less economical than activity, nothing more prodigal than precipitation.

The day is finished by a promenade to Shoubrah,



the Champs-Élysées of Cairo, the rendezvous of the best society, native and European. The Avenue of Shoubrah is moreover very fine of itself; perhaps there does not exist one to equal it. It is bordered on each side by gigantic sycamores, which are at least forty years old, and which in our climate do not attain such dimensions in less than two or three centuries. Still lately, the branches of these sycamores joined and formed an impenetrable bower of foliage. They have been lopped, and, as people say, have lost much by this amputation. For my part, I do not know whether they have not rather gained much. No doubt their tops are not so bushy, not so deep as formerly; but then the sun that traverses their foliage sets off more the twisted forms of their trunks. One would fancy, at a distance, a series of colossal columns, violently wrung in every direction, upon which reposes an arch of dark bright green. The carriages go up and down this fine avenue amidst camels, horsemen, asses, and herds of buffaloes. On the borders of the road extensive fields of sugar-cane, Arabian villages, little woods of palm-trees, mimosas, and tamarisk stretch out as far as the yellow horizon of the desert. Towards sunset all this country assumes a golden tint of infinite softness, and the luminous rays gliding over the trunks of the sycamores enamel with spangles of gold the foliage of their arcade. On Friday, holiday of the Mussulmans, and Sunday, carriages abound. It is there one may

see, very near, the principal harems of Cairo, from that of the Viceroy to those of the lowest pachas. The ladies of the harems take a drive in brilliant costume in coupés with windows wide open. They have veils so transparent over their faces that they show the features much more than they hide them. Alas ! what a deception ! I advise those who would preserve the illusion of the harems, and lull their imagination in dreams of adorable Circassians, superb Georgians, and celestial houris—I advise them sincerely never to go to Shoubrah Fridays and Sundays. They certainly will not need the fierce airs and threatening gestures of the eunuchs to recoil from these great dolls, one might fancy, of wax, whose *embonpoint* can only please the Oriental taste, and whose excessive paleness and large dull eyes, which the *k'hol* enlarges with blackish dyes, produce the most sorrowful impression. If they approach a little nearer, they perceive immense hands badly gloved, necks of astonishing proportions badly retained in dresses without shape, robes of unsightly cut that are covered with embroidery ; they look like smart and gay sacks in which might be packed indefinable shapeless masses. In reality, the ladies of the harems spoil the Avenue of Shoubrah. Without them it would be impossible to take a walk in any promenade filled with more enchantments, when the sun is sinking in the horizon ; when the palm-trees show their elegant heads upon the reddening sky ; when the Nile reflects

the last glimmering of day ; when the silhouette of the Pyramids is profiled in the distance, and when the young European women, dressed in the latest fashion of Paris, defile in rapid calèches amid this Oriental landscape.\*

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\* I fear I may be accused of exaggeration in my manner of judging the women of the harems, so difficult is it to remove prejudices. The opinion I express on them is not, however, new. This is what Volney wrote about them nearly a century ago in his "*Voyage en Egypte et en Syrie*:" "The women of the Mamelukes are, like them, slaves brought from Georgia, Mingrelia, etc. Their beauty is constantly spoken of, and we are led to believe in its existence on the faith of its renown. But a European who has been in Turkey only, has no right to testify to it. These women there, are much more rarely visible than others, and, doubtlessly, it is to this mystery that they are indebted for the idea formed of their beauty. I have had an opportunity of obtaining information from the wife of one of our Cairo merchants, to whom the business of gold lace and Lyons silks opened all the harems. This lady, who had more than one right to be a judge, assured me that among a thousand to eleven hundred women of the *élite* she had seen, she had not found ten that were really beautiful. But the Turks are not so fastidious : provided a woman is white she is beautiful ; if she is fat she is admirable. *Her face is like the full moon ; her lips like cushions*, they say, to express the superlative of beauty. One might say that they measure it by the hundredweight. They have also a remarkable proverb for the philosophers : *Take a white for the eyes, but for other charms an Egyptian*. Experience has proved to them that the women of the North are really colder than those of the South." I leave to Volney the responsibility of his proverbs ! The impartiality, perhaps, of his appreciation might be contested, on the ground that he has given it on the authority of a woman, and that women, even "when they have more than one right to be good judges," are, however, very

bad judges of the beauty of other women. Be it so ! Shall we treat in the same way the appreciation of Napoleon the First, who, himself, had judged after his personal experience, not after the authority of anybody whatever ! "Bonaparte," says De Bourrienne, in his *Memoires* (tome II., chap. xi., page 173), "Bonaparte caused to be introduced into the house of Elfy Bey half-a-dozen Asiatic women, whose charms and beauty they had praised to him ; but their figures and their corpulency procured for them their instant dismissal. A few days afterwards he conceived a strong passion for Madame Fourès, the wife of a lieutenant of infantry ; she was very pretty, and the extreme rarity in Egypt of women that could please Europeans enhanced her attractions."

I stop here; the remainder of the story, especially that part concerning M. Fourès, recalling too vividly a certain adventure of the holy King David. But it is seen that Bonaparte had the same taste as the French merchant of Volney. In truth, he had not passed in review, as the latter had, a thousand to eleven hundred women ; but may not one form a sound opinion with half-a-dozen ? I hope that the testimony of a great general, confirming that of an excellent philosopher, will convince the most incredulous of the accuracy of my own.

## CHAPTER VII.

### BOOLAK—THE BATHS—THE FELLAH WOMEN— FUNERALS—CIRCUMCISION—MARRIAGE.

AT half a league from Cairo on the Nile is Boolak. Boolak is the port of Cairo ; it is there that travellers, proceeding to the first Cataract, come to choose elegant dahabiehs, or to take their places in the steam-boats that perform a regular service for Assouan and the Isle of Philæ. The streets of Boolak resemble those of Cairo, except that they are still narrower and darker, that the *moucharabiehs* there are older and more dilapidated, and finally, that the spectacle of misery is there more hideous. It is necessary to have a certain amount of courage to conquer the repulsion inspired by Arabian filth, associated with all the infirmities it engenders. During the first weeks of my sojourn at Cairo—must I admit it ?—the spectacle of the blind, the one-eyed old men afflicted with every malady, women in rags and tatters, houses in ruins, refuse accumulated from every quarter, inspired me with an invincible disgust. Happily, the fierceness of the sun soon transforms all this repulsiveness of men and things ; but the eye has need of a certain

education not to suffer from it. Little by little, this immense Court of Miracles named Cairo is no longer offensive through its loathsome aspects; one admires simply those that are picturesque. As to the ruins, they have certainly their special beauty. Among most of them are found ornaments of architecture to which the aspect of decay gives an additional charm. Art does not spread on all sides in Cairo; it is necessary to go in search after it. But as soon as one has got in the way of doing it, there is no quarter so dark, no street so infected, or house so dismantled, where may not be observed delicious details. It seems that a prodigal hand has spread over every construction, every ruin, fine arabesques, which embellish them or transform them when it becomes necessary.

It is at Boolak that is established the Museum of Egyptian antiquities of Mariette Bey, as he has been called hitherto, Mariette Pacha, as we must call him in future. The description of it is everywhere, and I will not attempt to give it again. God forbid that I should pretend to be an Egyptologist! I have visited many times the Museum of Boolak, but I have visited it as an amateur, not as a savant. This museum is situated on the banks of the Nile, and when the inundation is copious it is partly submerged. It had, in fact, a narrow escape from being carried away last year (1879). Admirable treasures brought together by our illustrious countryman might have perished in this catastrophe. The European ministration had

thought of removing elsewhere the Egyptian Museum ; the work 'of installation had even commenced in a palace that is of no use at present ; but it had been interrupted by Ismaïl Pacha, after the dismissal of Monsieur de Blignières and Mr. Wilson, under the pretext of economy. God grant that the economy may not cost science some day or other the loss of incomparable riches !\*

Besides, since I must admit it, it was not solely to visit the Egyptian Museum that I went to Boolak. I had been told that I should find there Arabian baths cleaner and more elegant than those of Cairo ; I wished to find out if that were true. Nearly all the narratives of travels speak of the baths of Cairo ; there is not a greater hoax. I have made a general round of these establishments, and I have not found a single one that has tempted me the least in the world. Doubtlessly, a few of them were very fine at the time of Kayt-Bey or Ahmed-êbn-Touloun, but to-day they are like everything else in Cairo, in a state of ruin. The marble paving is dislocated, the columns broken, the arches discoloured and covered with a layer of dark grease. It was at Syout that I found the least objectionable. The Arabian baths are

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\* The Boolak Museum has not been removed ; it has been completely restored since the above lines were written. The ground has been raised to avoid inundations, and the rooms enlarged to accommodate fresh collections. It is now perfectly installed, and there is no longer any fear for the future.

essentially composed of a low and dark chamber, lighted through the vault by a few round openings. When this chamber is filled with steam, and a demi-obscurity pervades everywhere, the luminous rays that pass through these openings and extend in long trails on the walls and pavement, produce there effects rather fantastic. After passing through this vaulted chamber, one enters into a sort of narrow lobby furnished with a large marble table. It is there where the bathers repose on emerging from the bath, before submitting to the shampooing. One sometimes meets there *tableaux vivants* capable of charming the greatest artist. When Arabs and Nubians, wrapped up in their blue or red wrappers, half slumbering, surrender themselves to a sort of siesta, they form in the opal penumbra the most graceful groups. On certain days the baths are exclusively reserved to women. Then a carpet placed over the door indicates to the men that they must pass on without entering. It often happened that I visited the baths at the moment the women left them. A terrible trial! The perfumed traces of the bathers are mortal to the most robust illusions. If you would preserve these illusions regarding the Arabian women, never pass through a bath the day it is exclusively devoted to them.

It would not be perhaps inopportune to speak of the Arabian women, not of the ladies of the harem, with whom I have finished, but of the middle-class

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women that are met with in the streets, and the fellah women, properly called, who teem in the populous quarters and in the country. The former are enveloped in a large piece of taffetas, constantly black, called *habarah*, which descends from head to foot and disguises entirely their figure. However little the wind may be entrapped under this great floating veil, they assume the aspect of inflated balloons mounted on two satin boots. Their face is covered from the middle of the nose with a long piece of stuff, which descends, in becoming narrower, like a beard more and more pointed to the waist and sometimes to the bottom of the robe. This piece of stuff, with the countrywomen especially, is embellished with ornaments of all sorts, of piastres, of charms which go on to join again the earrings and make the fellah woman's face resemble a petty jeweller's shop. A kind of reed-pipe in metal, generally composed of gilt filigrane, unites this bit of stuff to the part of the *habarah* that covers the head. The forehead and eyes only remain uncovered. These eyes, almost always very large and exaggerated moreover by the *k'hol*, have a lively brilliancy; they glow like burning carbuncles. The women of the lower class generally wear a simple blue chemise, widely open over the chest, which exposes all their neck. A black veil envelopes their head and falls elegantly over their shoulders. It is rarely that they have their face covered. At most they hide it now and then by lifting a lappet of their veil,

which gives to their physiognomy more grace and more artfulness. Under this costume, compendious and buoyant, they are as little clothed as possible ; at every movement all the contours of their figure are visible. When they are very young, they are admirably made. But the custom of marrying from ten to twelve years old, sometimes even at eight, is not backward in deforming them. At thirty they are as old and as faded as they could be in our country at fifty or sixty. They do not become corpulent like the women of the harem. Everybody knows that their step is grace itself when, even in carrying a heavy amphora on the head, the chest forward, the back well curved, the shoulder raised and the arm sustaining to the height of the head a light burden, they advance with a hurried pace. They have the turn, erect, light and slender, of the antique statues. But what is astonishing is the suppleness of their body. They rarely sit down ; they squat down with their knees raised in a posture which we should find excessively fatiguing, and in which they repose, on the contrary, from the greatest efforts. The men are endowed with the same suppleness. Their habitual posture is that which is observed in the ancient Egyptian stela : the knees drawn together before the face to the height of the nose, or opened on each side of the head as high as the ears. This latter posture is very awkward. But as soon as these bodies rolled-up together get up, they are splendid ; they have, according to the very

just remark of Fromentin, "something of ungainliness, and at the same time something of stateliness, which permit them to assume in squatting the postures of the ape, and upright the attitudes of the statue." \*

On returning from Boolak to Cairo one meets almost always on the road several funerals. The funerals are one of the strangest sights of Cairo, and the first one sees astonishes very much. At the head of the procession march a corporate body of the blind, and a certain number of men, who proceed at a quick step, singing to the most jubilant air in the world in swinging themselves from right to left: "*La ilah, il Allah ou Mohammed Ressoul Allah!*" One would suppose that they were in a hurry to finish a ceremony, pleasing no doubt, since it inspires them only with agreeable ideas and the most pleasurable movements.

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\* The suppleness of the Egyptians in general is prodigious. Most workmen use almost as often their feet as their hands. The turners, who make *moucharabiehs*, hold each bit of wood with the great toe, just as they could do it with any single finger. The women who collect in the streets rags and bits of paper, take them up with their foot just as dexterously as our rag-gatherers do with their crook. Generally, they seize an object with their great toe, then bear it to their hand, with which they throw it into the basket placed behind their shoulders. But I have seen one that simplified the movement by lifting the foot without the least difficulty, and with a rapid movement, as far as the basket. The Egyptians move their legs just as their arms; it seems that all their members are attached with the same suppleness and possess the same flexibility. It is an anthropological peculiarity that brings them near enough to apes to gladden the hearts of transmutationists.

Behind them comes the funeral car, or rather, a sort of bier, bearing a great red shawl in which the body is deposited. At the extremity of the bier, on a perch, is placed the turban or the *tarbouche* of the defunct. Two men carry this bier. They follow with such high spirits the movement of the head of the cortège, that the corpse, rocked in every direction, seems to jump under the shawl that shrouds it. The women bring up the rear, some on asses, others on foot. The first row is formed of weepers, or rather screamers, who send forth towards Heaven, at each step, the shrillest notes. The mixture of joyous songs from the men with the screeching exclamations of the women produces the drollest effect. The weepers hold in their hand a handkerchief, with which they are not solicitous of wiping their eyes perfectly dry, but which they pull by the two ends behind their head with a gesture that would be desperate if it were not droll. On arrival at the cemetery, they take the corpse from the bier to cast it, such as it is, into the grave.

The grand funerals take place with much more solemnity. An important personage is hardly dead before his friends and acquaintances hurry to the house; during one or two days they eat and drink at the expense of the defunct, or rather his heirs, in indulging in the noisiest demonstrations. When the hour of the interment arrives, a scene of the wildest character is produced. The slaves and women of

the household throw themselves on the corpse and feign a determination to hinder it from passing the threshold. This lugubrious tragedy is played conscientiously ; they snatch away the coffin, they belay each other with blows, the most violent and frightful clamour is heard ; it is in short a real battle in which, if there is only one dead, there are at least often many wounded. At last the procession leaves the house ; it is preceded by camels loaded with victuals, which are distributed to the poor hurrying in crowds along the road. But it must not be supposed that the pace is rapid, brisk, and gay as in that of humbler processions. All along the road the relatives and friends of the family fight for the honour of bearing the bier for an instant ; it passes then, or rather bounds from hand to hand amidst the most frightful disorder. The interment ended, every one returns to the house of the defunct to recommence the festivities, dancing, and the mortuary demonstrations. The mourning lasts at least a year. During this year, every day at the same hour, the women unite, then begin uttering plaintive cries, rolling themselves on the ground, playing on the tarabook, firing even pistol shots, expressing in a word their grief by the most alarming uproar. A mother who loves her daughter is expected to execute this noisy comedy until the expiration of the regular period. If her husband gets tired of the noise, she goes to her own family, so that she may conduct her mourning in conformity with the

usual rites, and she returns to the conjugal home only after having played to the end, surrounded and aided by all her friends, her obstreperous rôle.

It is a curious thing to see how necessary noise is to the Arabs. They have no other manner of expressing their impressions. But joyous noise with them is the sign of grief, whilst slow and doleful noise is the mark of joy. Nothing is more melancholy, for instance, to European ears than their amorous music, interrupted by the plaintive *ah!* of the audience, which seems like the wail of the unhappy giving up their last breath, but which, on the contrary, is the enthusiastic hurrah of excited amateurs. When the lover celebrates his triumph, we Europeans would suppose that he is going to bury his well-beloved, and that he is weeping over her dead body like Paul over that of Virginia, like Chactas over that of Atala, like Des Grieux over that of Manon. In return, when death is really present, in the funerals, the free and easy advance of the cortège, the singing almost burlesque, express, it seems, the deepest grief. If human sentiments are eternal, if they are found everywhere the same, if manners, climates, races, religions, modify in no way their nature, we must admit that their expression follows the most diverse laws; tongues are not more varied than the musical modulations with which man breathes out the sufferings or joys that agitate his heart.

At Cairo one meets with almost as many weddings

as funerals. Grand weddings are composed of a series of elegant carriages, preceded by a band, before which jugglers perform tricks in their usual way. The last of these carriages is drawn by four splendid horses, each held by a *saïs*, and whose blinkers are embellished with handkerchiefs embroidered with gold. The carriage is covered with a large cachemire. It is under this impenetrable veil that the bride advances. A few horsemen caper around it, hundreds of beggars pursue it crying, "*Backchiche !*" The ordinary weddings are more picturesque. There, the band is very primitive ; it is composed of a few flutes and a tarabouk ; a certain number of children escort it with long rods encircled with red rags ; the procession follows ; at last comes the bride, literally buried under a red veil that covers her head and descends to her feet. Two women support and guide her in the obscurity that surrounds her ; a canopy is raised over her ; large tablets, decorated with glass beads and gilt ornaments resembling massive banners, come between in the procession, the members of which stop from time to time to listen to an air or utter some cries. Generally it is preferred to make a wedding coincide with a circumcision ; an arrangement that not only spares a double expense, but brings good luck to the wedded pair. The circumcision is, moreover, a grand family fête that demands the most pompous ceremonies. There, may be seen defiling a great many little girls in the most brilliant costumes, their heads

covered with flowers, women, jugglers, red rods, torches, bands, and all the paraphernalia of the wedding. The hero or the heroes of the fête come last, sometimes on an ass, sometimes in carriages, where they may be recognized by their anxious countenances, and the attention of their parents, who appear to devote themselves to encouraging them by charitable exhortations. The circumcision takes place from seven to ten years of age, sometimes later. I have not had, like Gérard de Nerval, the chance of assisting to the end at the operation, but more than one victim, in relating to me the particulars, has said to me on finishing, with as much resolution as Aria, "*Non dolet !*" \*

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\* "Circumcision takes place at six or seven years old, and coincides with the moment the child leaves the harem. Custom requires that the little boy, previous to the ceremony, should be driven through the streets to the sound of noisy music ; and in order to render less burdensome the expenses resulting from it, several families perform it in common ; or one even waits till a marriage renders a wedding procession necessary in the quarter, when the two processions can take place together the same time. By a singular contradiction, the child was exposed formerly on horseback, at present in an open carriage, and as they fear 'the evil eye,' they smother the child in rich female costume, in which he almost entirely disappears. They cover it with rich ornaments, which should attract the sight and turn it from the child, who, moreover, is made to hold a white handkerchief over his mouth, which conceals nearly all his face. Poor families confine themselves to this procession, called *Zeffeh*. If the child belongs to a family rich or in easy circumstances, and if he is already at school, his schoolfellows, the



The marriage ceremony does not finish in the day-time. In the evening, the parents and friends of the bridegroom conduct him with pomp to the dwelling of his bride. It is a charming procession, which in the silence and obscurity of the night animates the streets of Cairo with noise and bright lights. The inevitable band, playing airs *à porter le diable en terre*, precedes the procession; then advance in two files young men bearing lighted *machallas*, or simple candles surrounded with glass globes. The *machallas* are composed of an iron rod surmounted by a little grate, in which they burn resinous logs. They are a sort of torches, from which escape by millions of sparks the débris of the wood cinders, and sometimes flaming brands.

The cortège marches with a ceremonial step as slowly as the funerals go quickly. They stop frequently without the least plausible reason, unless it be

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*fiki* and the *arif*, the master and mistress, assemble in the father's house. If he is not yet a school-boy, the master and the pupils of the school, where he is to go later, attend in the same manner. These children sing or rather chant a prayer in harmonious rhythm, in a way a little drawling, almost indiscernible, like many Arab melodies, to a European ear. Thus, like all family fêtes, this ceremony is for the Egyptian an occasion to exercise the most cordial, the most liberal hospitality; the house is open to every comer, the stranger attracted through curiosity is received with the same affectionate friendliness as the most intimate friends."—(DOR-BEY. *The Public Instruction in Egypt*.)

to accustom the bridegroom to patience. The latter brings up the file between two friends bearing immense bouquets. They thus arrive, after many rounds, many stoppages, and much clamour, at the residence of the bride. This dwelling is decorated with a great tent, from which hang a quantity of little red flags with silver crescents; under the tent are placed long seats, where everyone is seated to take coffee, smoke cigarettes, swallow lemonade, and listen all night to Arabian airs. The bridegroom enters alone into the house; the friends remain at the door, contemplating the stars, enjoying the music, and indulging in the fancies of their imagination. Gleams of light appear and disappear in the apartments, numerous shadows of women glide in and out; then all is darkness. But the music continues below on the steps. In one of the first evenings of my sojourn at Cairo, I amused myself, in company with a few foreigners like myself, in following one of these weddings. On arriving at the house, they made room for us with the usual Oriental politeness; everyone offered us his own seat, and hastened to bring us coffee, lemonade, and cigarettes. Fearing that the Arabian airs might not please us, they sent for a military band, which executed all night, liberally aided by the tambours, the big drum, and the cornets à pistons, the principal subjects of *la Mère Angot*. It was to do us honour that they gave themselves up to this luxurious riot of Frank music, as it was called

by one of the masters of the ceremony. My national feeling was delicately stirred by this uproar termed French ; but in spite of me, I could not help asking myself what the bridegroom must have thought of it, who, no doubt, had hoped to be gently lulled by the vague and chinking notes of the Arab guitar. Perhaps, however, he thought nothing at all about it ; and probably the idea did not strike him to whisper into the ears of his bride, like Lorenzo in the ears of Jessica—

“ Soft stillness, and the night,  
Become the touches of sweet harmony.”

## CHAPTER VIII.

### THE TOMBS OF THE CALIPHS.

It was with the Tombs of the Caliphs\* that I wished to begin my round of the mosques, in order to have at once under the eye the most finished types, probably, of Arabian architecture. Monsieur Baudry had been kind enough to serve me as a guide, or rather serve us as a guide, for I formed part, though unworthily, of a little caravane of artists; and it would have been difficult to have been conducted by a man knowing better in all their details these marvels of an art full of fancy, originality, and grace. The Tombs of the Caliphs are at some distance from Cairo, at the foot of the Mokatam, at the entrance of the desert. The simplest way of visiting them is to mount a donkey, and jog resolutely through the compact crowd of the Mousky. After having run the risk a score of times of breaking your legs

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\* We should strictly say, in fact, *the tomb of the Sultan Mamelukes*, for the mosques known as the "Tombs of the Caliphs" contain no caliph's grave. In a book like this, however, not professedly scientific, it is better to retain the popular term.

against the wheels of the carriages, and of running over the pedestrians in revenge, you arrive at the extremity of the Mousky, opposite to the great sand-hills, formed of all kinds of détrit<sup>us</sup>, upon which a row of windmills swing their long arms, and which would have inspired Don Quixote with the most bellicose sentiments. They stand out so clear on a sky of a blue so crude, that they seem really to be advancing towards you with a threatening gesture. The crossing of these sand-hills is not very pleasant. The donkeys are up to their knees in sand ; parties of children amuse themselves in stirring it up, and pursue the cavalier with their everlasting exclamation : *Backchiche ! backchiche !* After two or three refusals, they know well they will get nothing ; but that matters little to them ; they run and shout all the same : it is for them a kind of a point of honour. Nothing discourages them, and when at last, to get rid of them, you raise an inoffensive stick, they scamper away as fast as they can, screaming with laughter, almost as joyful as if they had got what they wanted.

All at once, between two walls of sand, appear the Tombs of the Caliphs. Nothing can give an idea of this sight, the most melancholy and the finest that I have ever met with in my life. The background of the picture is formed on the left by a fiery-red hill, named the Montagne-Rouge ; it joins the bluish escarpments of Mokatam, bathed in a

transparent vapour, which gives to them a fairy aspect ; on the right, the citadel, more gloomy, lifts its great walls into the azure of the sky. Before the girdle of rocks, which seem to be arranged like reflectors of light, an immense group of minarets and cupolas, crowded together, glitter like a magic apparition. It is the Necropolis of the Caliphs—a city of tombs, a cemetery of a special kind, that resembles in no way Turkish cemeteries, since it does not contain a blade of verdure, since one sees there only walls and dust, but the débris of construction scattered in the desert. The Arabs desired to place their tombs in the solitude, far from the eyes of the world, in the centre of a valley of sand, as if to hinder the busy noise of life from troubling their last sleep. The environs of the Tombs of the Caliphs are formed of mounds, amid which one often loses himself without seeing any other object around than a yellowish rampart that surrounds him everywhere. I remember having tarried a long time in one of these numerous promenades at the Tombs of the Caliphs, in the bottom of a sort of funnel of an intense colour, like the brightest gold ; the sky, of an intense blue, seemed superposed on the summit of this funnel, which it closed in hermetically. This contrast of two tones equally violent, deprived of any shade, would have been anywhere else offensive and insufferable ; it was there, without knowing why, of marvellous harmony. Nature alone can permit

herself such liberties ; Art would be impotent to imitate them. But when one encounters them in reality, they produce a mixture of inexpressible surprise and admiration ; they are impressions that partake of a dream, the remembrance of which, though always intense, leaves on the mind the sentiment of a prodigious illusion.

When you advance amid the Tombs of the Caliphs, you soon find yourself surrounded by a crowd of children, who frolic merrily on these sepulchral ruins. Through a sort of caprice of fortune, dawning life bursts forth everywhere in this great cemetery ; never has the antithesis of youth and death taken a more tangible or striking form. They are the guardians of the tombs and the few inhabitants of this mortuary city that people it with this numerous offspring. Surrounded with the desert, without wants like all other Arabs, working consequently seldom, they bring forth children, it seems, in order to pass away the time. I asked one day a guardian of one of the tombs, who was walking about, surrounded with an immense family, whence came the prolific ardour, the results of which I witnessed. "What should I do?" he replied, "it is so wearisome here." An artist would never get wearied here ; he would require years to pick up the exquisite débris scattered on the ground, in order to discover under the rust and dust marvels almost obliterated, to reconstruct in his imagination those adorable monuments

that disappear day by day—carried away in atoms by the wind of the desert ! For, alas ! the Tombs of the Caliphs are disappearing, and if care be not taken, in a few years they will exist no longer. It is sufficient to cast the eyes over the plates of the fine work of the French Expedition to be convinced of the damage and irreparable losses sustained since that period. The first cupolas one perceives, on arriving from the direction of the Mousky, are cracked through the centre ; they rest on two walls that lean from each other, and which will soon fall, each on its own side. There are there elegant doors, charming inscriptions, that will be broken in the fall. It is a matter for serious reflection that a few of the thousands expended in raising grotesque palaces, that resemble barracks or prisons, would have sufficed to preserve for the admiration of the world these unique specimens of a delicious art ! But the Turks are one of the races the least artistic that ever existed ; they have suffered very many other treasures to be lost, almost as rare. May the malediction of the god of the arts come down on them !

In general the mosques of Cairo are very badly built. Their foundations repose on the sand ; their walls are raised most recklessly. But, on this frail skeleton, the genius of decoration has exercised itself in endless fancies. Unfortunately, these fancies are as fragile as graceful. Delicate friezes, arabesques of infinitely fine work, are in simple plaster. The



slightest blow causes them to fall, and they are finished for ever. Now, God knows with what brutal hands the Turks and the Arabs of our time touch these delicate wonders ! The first comer carries away stones, most frequently from the angles of the mosques, and this undermines the entire edifice ; blundering donkey-drivers bore holes there to attach their asses ; the camel-drivers do the same. By degrees a piece of wall crumbles away, there remains nothing but rubbish ; then they pull down everything to clear the spot. It is thus that fell the mosque of Esbek on the Place Méhémet-Ali. Asses were stabled in the interior, and they had perforated in every direction the pulpit, where the iman explains the Koran ; and through these openings they passed the thong of the halter. Sometimes they pull down the entire side of a mosque to make a roadway. And, as if all these causes of destruction were not enough, the Egyptian Government has placed a powder magazine in the most complete and best preserved of the mosques of the caliphs, the mosque of the Sultan Barkouk. The stupidity or imprudence of a soldier would suffice to blow up the necropolis altogether.

God forbid that I should try to give the faintest idea of the Tombs of the Caliphs ! Never has the imagination of the Arabs written forms on stones more exquisite, never has it raised with more grace, spirit, and fancy, works more delicately beautiful.

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It is the mosque of the Sultan Barkouk that excites the most admiration. As for me, I prefer that of Kayt-Bey, a perfect jewel, each morsel of which has been chiselled with a finished perfection. The minaret of Kayt-Bey is the *chef-d'œuvre* of the minarets in the florid style ; its cupola, perhaps, has not its equal in the world. One is surprised at the prodigious variety of the decorations of this mosque. Every tympan on the doors is ornamented with a particular subject, the frames of the windows are sculptured from top to bottom, the window-shutters are covered with bronzes, bearing the finest Arabic inscriptions. In the interior everything is in marble or wood-work, inlaid with ivory and ebony ; the stones are consolidated together in forming vermicular windings of the greatest elegance. But, what is of an effect at once delightful and imposing, is the cupola seen from the interior. It is lighted by means of stained glass, which is seen in all Arabian buildings, and which has the merit of presenting to the eye shades of colour always new. Instead of being formed like ours, with an even surface diversely coloured, it is incrustated in a frame of thick plaster, cut out in various designs, the ledges of which, according to the elevation of the sun in the horizon, according to the brilliancy of its rays, and even according to the place of the spectator on one side or the other, project shadows on the glass that modify continually the colours. The light sifted by this stained glass plays in the cupola with

wonderful delicacy, and strikes against false pendentives in the form of bee-hives, alas! three-quarters fallen, but which are still among the most perfect of Cairo. The court of the mosque, relatively small, presents to the eye one of the most striking effects of the Oriental sky. When one looks at the sky alone in its ensemble, he does not remark sufficiently the intensity of its blue colour, but when he perceives but a bit over grey walls, that seems to join them, the contrast of the two tones gives to the blue a vividness that is dazzling. On each side of the court, under two pretty arcades, are the compartments devoted to prayer. These chambers are exactly alike, except that one of them is decorated with the most charming ceiling, whilst the ceiling of the other, recently fallen, has been replaced by a "gin palace" decoration — white with large stripes of red and green. It is thus that the Turks restore when they restore! Nothing would have been easier for them than to have put the fallen ceiling into its place again. Amateurs and architects have thus set up again a great number of them, which are, at present, as fresh and as perfect as when they came from the hands of the Arab artists. Provided there remain but a few specimens of tympana where one recovers the design, and what is still more difficult to conceive, the diverse tints of the painting, it is merely a question of reproducing faithfully these models. But, as time proceeds, the specimens disappear, and we

shall see the day when there will remain nothing in the mosques as specimens of Arab ceilings but the "tavern ceiling" of Kayt-Bey. A part of the façade having crumbled away, it has been replaced by a plain wall, against which are fixed coarse stairs, whilst in the ancient walls, there is not a stone that has not been carved like a gem. But we must not be led to suppose that all this abundance of ornamentation detracts from the beauty of the usual lines. There results from it—I do not know how—an accomplished harmony. In the ceilings each tympan differs from the adjoining one in design and colour, and yet these tympan united merge into an ensemble, where everything is in its place, and the whole attracts the eye. It is the same with the entire edifice. That lace-work of plaster, of stone, of bronze, of marble, and of wood, which runs over the walls of the mosque, covers its cupola, climbs over its minaret, and suspends itself over the void in innumerable corbels, like the drooping leaves and flowers of a plant encircling the trunk of a palm, is admirably conformable to the light forms of an architecture, of which the sole rule appears to be gracefulness in fanciful and original conception.

The Mussulman devotees venerate, in the mosque of Kayt-Bey, two cubes of granite, the one grey, and the other rose-colour, where they show the print of the Prophet's feet. I do not know on what occasion Mahomet walked so heavily on granite as to leave

there a mark so deep ; all I can say is, to judge from their traces, that he had very large feet. I regret very much not having gone to Damascus, on leaving Cairo, in order to be assured, by counter-verification, of the accuracy of this important particular. Damascus possesses also the print of the Prophet's foot. Mahomet had intended to enter into the capital of Syria, but at the moment when one of his blessed feet touched the ground, and the other was going to follow, the angel Gabriel appeared to inform him that Allah left him the choice of entering into the paradise of this earth or into that of eternity ; that if he persisted in visiting the groves of Damascus, he must renounce the gardens of the celestial houris. Mahomet was too prudent to hesitate ; he mounted on his saddle and returned into Arabia ; but, to the eternal confusion of the unbelievers, and for the eternal instruction of travellers who might be tempted to allow themselves to be seduced by the irresistible charms of Damascus, the foot of the Prophet, that had already stepped on the rocky soil, left there an ineffaceable mark. Some cavillers maintain, it is true, that the impression was not due to Mahomet, but to the angel Gabriel, who having taken the human form whilst preserving the angelic lightness, kept himself standing on one foot whilst talking with the Prophet: *grammatici certant!* To settle the difficulty, it would only remain to compare the impression of Damascus with that of Cairo. If the foot

is large, it is the prophet's ; if little, it is the angel's. After this test, doubt would no longer be possible, and all controversy would cease ; but what would become of the theologians, if they were deprived of every ground for discussion !

We passed a whole hour at the mosque of Kayt-Bey, slowly contemplating every part, trying to conjecture, under the coating of dirt that covers them, decorative details of charming originality ; and we should have remained there still longer, if Monsieur Baudry had not given us the signal to depart. It was to arrive at the summit of a mound that overlooks the Tombs of the Caliphs, at the moment when the rays of the setting sun overspread the minarets and cupolas of the mosque of the Sultan Barkouk with a reflection of rose and gold. There is there a moment, very short, unfortunately, which is magnificent. All the minarets, all the cupolas, glow like torches that would throw out a last flash ; behind them, the Montagne-Rouge takes blood-coloured tints ; afar away, the desert shimmers with a brilliancy that might be compared with melting glass ; the great blue line of the Nile, spangled with white spots by the sails of the dahabiehs, proceeds to lose itself under the dark verdure of the avenue of Shoubrah ; numerous little clouds pass in a few moments through every shade of red and rose, and die out in violet.

In returning, we went along the citadel, built by Saladin, and whose great massive lines, heavy ma-

chicoulis, and battlements not indented, present so complete a contrast with the architecture of the mosques. The citadel is very curious in its way ; it dates from the epoch of Philippe-Auguste, and it is impossible, when one sees this construction of a time so remote still intact, not to recognize the influence that the Arab monuments have exercised over our feudal edifices. Is it not equally from the East that the Crusaders have brought the taste for ornamentation, the practice of emblazonry, a certain need of luxury, the instinct of chivalry ? But whilst I put these historical questions to myself, the citadel is turned, an admirable vista opens up to view Cairo, the Nile, and finally, the Pyramids, lifting their mass against a sky of fire. Cairo being already plunged in the shade, and the eye measuring badly the distance, the Pyramids have the look of resting on a vast black pedestal. Closed in thus in the space between the citadel and the Mokatam, darkened by the twilight, they appear inordinately grand ; they are gigantic masses, with which the imagination is overwhelmed. What strange variety of human sentiments ! The Pyramids also are tombs ; but what a difference from the Tombs of the Caliphs ! Here, mountains of stone covering enormous space ; there, light and slender edifices barely touching the ground ! Here, the grand, simple, and strong lines of a gloomy and restless spirit ; there, all the circuitous ways of an enchanting, light, careless,

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exquisite imagination. And yet there is a resemblance between the Pyramids and the Tombs of the Caliphs ; they are equally placed in the desert. The Pharaohs, like the caliphs, still later, had then determined to place their tombs beyond the reach of the noise of the world—in the deep solitude and awful stillness of boundless space !



## CHAPTER IX.

### THE MOSQUES.

WHEN one has been moved by the beauties of the Tombs of the Caliphs, it is difficult not to visit in detail the mosques of Cairo. There are about four hundred of them, and very few among them are quite unimportant. Almost all are remarkable, at least, in some of their parts. A mosque, as is known, is essentially composed of an interior court, in which runs the fountain for ablutions, called *meidah*, where the faithful, before devoting themselves to prayer, should wash their arms as far as above the elbows, and their legs as far as above the knees, and, finally, the head, which is almost always shaved with this object: there they suffer to grow merely a lock of hair, by which the angel of Death should seize the faithful to take them into paradise. The court of ablutions is almost always planted with a few sycamores, or a few acacias, which poetically shade the fountain. We penetrate afterwards into the sanctuary, *maksora*, a hall a little elevated above the court, the paving of which is covered with large mats or

elegant carpets. It is not proper to pray on the bare ground or on the stone ; one should place himself, if possible, in praying to God, on a piece of immaculate cloth. Inscriptions run along the walls of the *mak-sora* ; lamps, ostrich eggs, swing there on long chains, embellished with tufts of silk. In truth, the lamps have disappeared almost everywhere—carried off or stolen by amateurs, too enthusiastic for Arab art ; but the chains still remain, and the tufts of silk, remarkably greasy, dangle in the void. In the middle of the sanctuary is placed the *mimbar*, that is, the pulpit, where the iman explains the Koran. The *mimbar*, in the fine mosques, is, or rather, has been, an admirable piece of art ; but there, also, amateurs have generally torn away the prettiest objects in wood-work inlaid with ivory, and the modern restorers have filled up the vacant spaces with a coarser wood, painted in hideous colours. Finally, the niche of the *kébla* (thing that is in face of), directed towards Mecca, is surrounded with incrustations of pearl, tortoise-shell, jasper, and porphyry, on a ground of black or white marble ; charming twisted pillars support the demi-vault.

The most ancient Egyptian mosque is the mosque of Amru, situated at Fostatt. It is now nothing but a ruin, but a ruin of *chefs-d'œuvre*. It is related that when Amru had decided to build his mosque, he chose a piece of land that formed part of the inheritance of a Jewish widow. This widow resembled

the miller of Sans-Souci ; she refused to give up her property, even for just compensation. Did Amru, who had just conquered Egypt, recoil before the resistance of a simple woman ? It was Omar himself who was charged to solve the question. He sent to his lieutenant a sheep's skull, upon which he had traced a straight line, and an oblique one. As clever as Œdipus in the art of solving enigmas, Amru understood directly. "Oh ! caliph," he cried, "thou art right, thou must follow the straight line, which is God's, and avoid the oblique one, which is that of the stoned Chitan." But there is with Heaven a way of arranging difficulties, and the straight line may be surrounded with many arabesques. Whilst entirely renouncing any project of violence, Amru believed that he might permit himself a little shuffling subterfuge. He sent for the Jewish widow, and proposed to buy of her the portion merely of her field that could be covered by the skin of a newly-killed ox. The latter, not knowing the story of Dido, accepted then with a smile, and the mosque of Amru was built, thanks to the same stratagem that had permitted the birth of Carthage. We will not calumniate Jesuitism. We owe to it many very great and very fine things in every religion and in every country.

Although falling to pieces, the mosque of Amru is nevertheless admirable. Formerly it was sustained by one hundred and fifty columns of porphyry or granite, each of a single stone ; the half, at least, of

these columns is thrown down, but what remains has an aspect singularly imposing. It is evident that most of the columns have been taken from the antique temples. As they were of unequal length, it was necessary to raise them to a regular height by means of Corinthian, Byzantine, and Composite capitals from the most diverse parts of the East. A part of these capitals strew the ground beside the débris of the columns. The fountain for ablutions is partly thrown down. There are no more lamps, mats, nor carpets in the mosque of Amru ; everything there has the odour of decay, everything is tottering and seems on the point of falling altogether. Nevertheless, it still presents some remarkable curiosities. Two columns, placed at the entrance, are very close to each other, and yet one must pass between them if he would enter into paradise. I can affirm, from experience, that the undertaking is not easy ; but it is worth while to be tempted ; it is so sweet to be assured of one's eternal salvation, that one may well, for that object, bruise a rib or two ! \*

Near the *kébla*, a column is distinguished from the others around by a sensible depression, and by a vein

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\* The undertaking is no longer practicable. The Khedive, Tewfik Pacha, has had the space between the two pillars walled up, in order to discourage a superstition he considers ridiculous. Irreverent tongues say that, as he is very stout, he does not desire to expose himself to the too obvious impossibility of passing by this way to heaven.

that looks as if it had been produced by a smart lash of the courbache. The legend of this pillar ought to be related. The caliph Omar, who sent to his lieutenant Amru such pretty enigmas, was himself a remarkable magician. One day, when he was walking under the galleries of the mosque of Mecca, he looked towards Cairo, and saw that Amru was occupied in laying the foundation of his own mosque. The workmen had just raised a column beside the *kébba*. But this column, Omar perceived immediately, was fragile, badly carved, and of bad marble. It was evident that it ran the risk of falling, in drawing after it the entire edifice. What was to be done to avoid this accident? Omar imagined nothing better than to turn towards one of the pillars that surrounded him, and ordered it to go to Cairo by the shortest road, in order to replace Amru's column. The pillar trembled slightly ; but would one believe it? it did not stir an inch. Omar, irritated, gave it a furious blow with his fist, of which the deep impression seen on the column marks the spot ; the pillar, as if amazed, spun round on its own centre like a dervish, but did not depart. This time, Omar got into a rage ; taking his courbache, he beat it violently with it, exclaiming : " In the name of good and merciful God, go ! " There is nothing like giving a good reason why ! " Why hadst thou neglected to invoke God ? " replied the pillar, and it flew away in the air forthwith to place itself opposite the *kébba* of

the Egyptian mosque, to the great surprise and satisfaction of Amru. Thank heaven, this pillar is immovable, and there is in Egypt, at least one monument that will resist the barbarism of the Turks and degenerated Arabs ! In spite of its dilapidated aspect, the mosque of Amru could not disappear, for Allah alone could move the column that sustains it : no poke of the fist, no thwack of the courbache would henceforth succeed in throwing it down.

And why is it not the same with the mosque of Touloun, the largest of all in Cairo, the most ancient after that of Amru ? When one looks at it from the top of the citadel it seems immense ; its walls, cut into battlements having the form of leaves of trefoil, resemble the fortification of an entire city. In the interior, its vast proportions, its pure and simple style, still strike the eye with astonishment and admiration. The intention of its founder, Ahmed-êbn-Touloun, had been to render it immovable. To construct it he had chosen a Christian architect of the highest merit. The architect having been imprisoned under false suspicions, he had given him his liberty, he had him clad in a mantle of honour, had placed at his disposal 100,000 pieces of gold (about £60,000) for the preliminary expenses, and had ordered him to use in the building lime and brick only, without any combustible material. " I wish," said he, " that if Fostatt perish one day by water or by fire, my mosque may survive this destruction." Ahmed-êbn-Touloun had also

expressed the desire that no column should figure in the edifice, except two only, which were to be placed on each side of the *kébla*. It is for this reason that the arcades of the mosque are separated by great pillars, covered with the most elegant ornamentation. Charming Cufic inscriptions display themselves on the friezes. Unfortunately they are in simple plaster, which wastes away every day. An original legend is associated with the plan of the principal minaret : "Ahmed-êbn-Touloun," relate the Arabian writers, "was of a gloomy humour, and his face, always serious, bore constantly the impress of important occupations with which his mind was burdened, through the lofty projects he meditated, and the ruling cares of his vast empire. He had never been seen to give himself up a single moment to idleness and futile amusements. One day, however, when he was surrounded by the principal officers of his Court and the most renowned leaders of his army, he was sitting inattentively before a little table, on which there was, by chance, a quire of blank paper. Whilst his mind was thus a prey to a profound reverie, his fingers, moving unconsciously, were playing carelessly with the paper before him, and he seemed to busy himself with this puerile play with an apparent attention that struck every one around him with surprise : he rolled up and unrolled, folded again and again successively portions of this paper, cutting off now and then a portion, often destroying the

thing he had just made, just as we see children amuse themselves in building houses of cards, and, in changing their forms successively raised and thrown down. Ahmed woke up quite suddenly from the kind of lethargy in which his mind was slumbering, and he involuntarily coloured on regarding the play that seemed to occupy him and the general astonishment depicted on their countenances. Making up his mind at once, and desiring to assign a reasonable cause for what he had been doing undesignedly and without attention, he quickly added a few modifications to his light work: 'Send for the architect,' said he quickly. The latter having arrived: 'There,' said Ahmed, 'is the form thou wilt give to the minaret of my mosque. Think well of following, in the construction, the model which I have here given myself the trouble to prepare with my own hands.'" It is probable that the architect, a shrewd courtesan, made a show of following the idea of his master in raising the minaret. The seriousness of Ahmed vindicated itself: that was essential. Alas! this splendid mosque, so carefully constructed, of which the subjects of ornamentation are perhaps the most exquisite of Cairo, has been transformed by Abbas Pacha into a military hospital. He has built up, for that purpose, plain walls between the arcades; then he has broken, chipped, and blemished all the columns.

At present, the military hospital no longer exists, but the mosque of Touloun is the Court of Miracles



of Cairo ; it is a populous district, an immense rendezvous of all human wretchedness. A kind of idiot, who had served me as guide, related to me, in his way, the history of the foundation of the edifice. According to him, the mosque had been created before the earth ; the sea only existed and covered the globe entirely. God, who moved on the waves in a boat, stopped suddenly, and the extremity of his craft became the top of the *kébba*. I do not know what truth there is in this account, but what is certain is, that the walls of the mosque, the day I visited it, were covered with little steamboats, drawn with charcoal. I imagine that some unknown artists wished to represent God's boat. Another *kébba* has served the daughter of Ali, the sister of Hussein and of Hassan, for their prayers. And must it be said that a place sanctified by the daughter of Ali is now filled with the most horrible lepers in creation ! A characteristic feature of manners, which reflects well the sort of civilization introduced into Egypt by Ismaïl Pacha, is the way in which the mosque of Touloun has served for the recruiting of the first school for girls established in this country. At the time of the opening of the Isthmus of Suez, the Empress Eugénie, to whom they had shown Cairo, asked where the girls' school was. Ismaïl Pacha blushed ; there was no girls' school in Cairo ! The next day, he sent for his Minister of Public Instruction, and after having conferred with him, he ordered

the construction of an immense palace, where the daughters of the pachas might receive an European education. While this palace was building, they desired to make some effort to open in a more humble edifice a school for daughters of the *noblesse*. But, alas! no pacha sent his daughter to the Khedive's school. The classes remained empty ; the mistresses had nothing but benches before them. Despairing of the project, a man of spirit, Dor-Bey, Secretary to the Minister of Public Instruction, took it into his head to make a razzia in the mosque of Touloun, and to carry off by armed force all the little girls found there, in order to bring them officially into the school. That is how Cairo has now a school for girls. It is not, it is true, according to the original programme, a school for daughters of the *noblesse* ; but they do what they can.

The finest mosque in Cairo is the mosque of the Sultan Hassan, built at the foot of the citadel hill, in the Place Roumelieh. Its majestic cupola, its powerful minaret, its walls bare and lofty, surmounted with a magnificent cornice and formed with large honey-comb work in stone, strike at once by their grand aspect. The portal of the mosque, a model of almost all the portals of the same kind, is one of the most perfect products of Arab art. Of a height considerable in proportion to its width, surmounted by a demi-cupola, closed in, and cut out in stalactites, it presents a deep recess, at the foot of which is the

entrance door. The latter is covered with an armour of bronze, wonderfully worked, whilst the sides and the entire wall of the bottom of the portal are filled with arabesques of fanciful contours, or decorated with niches having slender and delicate colonettes. The interior of the mosque is still more imposing. The Court of the Ablutions, whose fountain is falling into decay, is surrounded with immense arcades in ogive arch, that give entrance into the sanctuary.\* Cufic inscriptions, cut in the wall, have been formed of letters of unusual size interwoven with flowers. You penetrate afterwards into the Hall of the Tomb, whose cupola seems much more elevated, and ten times more vast than that of the Panthéon of Paris. There the inscriptions are placed on boards, the half of which has disappeared ; the other half hangs over the void, and seems ready to fall. The false pendentives in honey-comb work are broken ; many pigeons make their nest in them. One might, however, restore them without trouble, for a few alveoli still remain intact, of which the designs and the colours are, as always, surprisingly varied. The impression produced by the mosque of Hassan is similar to that felt on entering our finest cathedrals. Never has religious thought been expressed with more force and sovereign majesty in any edifice

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\* This fountain has been restored, but in so clumsy a way, that it would have been better if they had left it alone.

raised by man. But, alas ! this mosque is one of the most dilapidated of Cairo. It has attained that critical moment when, if nothing be done to restore it, it will soon be, like the mosque of Amru, nothing but a ruin. Heaven preserve it, however, from unfortunate restoration ! The destruction complete would be tenfold better. There may be seen at the mosque of the Sultan Hassan, marbles of rare delicacy, covered with coarse paintings, representing false marbles, embellished here and there with red flowers. It was to receive the guests at the fêtes of the Suez Canal that the Ministers of Ismaïl Pacha had ordered this abominable whitewashing process to be passed over the principal monuments of Arabian art. God forgive them ; they knew not what they did !

It would require volumes to pass in review the mosques of Cairo : the mosque of the Sultan Kalaoûn ; the mosque of El-Azhar ; the mosque of Kayt-Bey, who was not at all contented in constructing for himself an incomparable tomb ; the mosque of El-Ghuri, whose portal is almost as fine as that of the mosque of the Sultan Hassan, and whose ceilings are certainly the best preserved and the most remarkable of Cairo ; at last, even the modern mosque of Méhémet-Ali, the walls of which are of alabaster, and the aspect of which is as magnificent as it is heavy and vulgar. A modern mosque near the Khan-Khalil contains, it appears, the head of Hussein, the

son of Ali. This mosque is not remarkable for its architecture, but it is fitted with the most sumptuous Persian carpets. It is the only one where one cannot really enter without taking off his shoes and walking barefooted ; in the others, it is sufficient to put on immense straw papooches. The Persians, who meet there, have a fanatic look, which the Arabs are far from having. I narrowly escaped from being knocked down by one of them, because I put on my shoes too near the door. It was impossible for me to penetrate into the hall where the head of Ali is deposited. The faithful piously kiss the door, and devoutly pass the curtain that covers it over their face ; but a *Nassara* (Christian) such as I, was not even worthy to approach it.

Besides the mosques, there are in Cairo a certain number of asylums for the dervishes, kinds of monasteries of a pretty architecture that carries one back to the Middle Ages. They are composed invariably of a court, in the middle of which the fountain for ablution is surrounded by sycamore and palm-trees that keep it always cool. All around, gloomy cells, furnished with mats, serve as residences for the dervishes. Their furniture is limited to a sort of divan, on which there are sometimes two or three dervishes artistically grouped, occupied in copying with long reeds the text of the Koran. The art of caligraphy is still much honoured among the Arabs ; the copyists there execute manuscripts worthy of comparison with

those of our old monks. A few papooches spread on the mat, a pitcher of water in a corner of the hall, a flower in a stoneware pot, complete these little graceful pictures, these charming scenes of a peaceful and silent life wholly occupied in work and religion.

Numerous houses, rather insignificant on the exterior, are in the interior genuine models of Arab architecture. The school for the blind, for example, would be admirable if it were kept up and restored. Its ceilings and stained-glass windows are very fine. An entire side of the court is furnished with the largest and perhaps the most delicately worked of the *moucharabiehs* of Cairo. It is the most transparent lacework of wood one can imagine, and a whole panel of the room which it encloses, softly lighted by the sunshine broken into endless beams, presents a mysterious aspect that reveals clearly to the understanding all the romantic illusions of Oriental existence. Poor blind creatures, placed, as if ironically, amid these marvels they will never dream of! Another house, not less remarkable, is that of the only true descendant of Mahomet known in Egypt; for, as to the apocryphal descendants, they may be counted by hundreds. This descendant is called Sadat. He is a very amiable young man; he enjoys throughout the country such an immense popularity that the Khedive himself is obliged to respect him. His family has been established in Egypt since the fifth century; his house, therefore, is of great antiquity. It is the type of

the Arabian house. One enters there by a court shaded by a fine sycamore and surrounded with *moucharabiehs*; a fountain runs in the centre. On one side extends a little mosque hidden by a grating, which, however, admits a sight of the *mimbar* surmounted by the green flag of the Prophet; on the other side, a door, carefully closed by a green carpet in the centre of which a red star is conspicuous, gives entrance into the harem. The *selamelek*, or reception-room, is of considerable elevation, but narrow, with magnificent ceilings, niches in stalactites, and false pendentives in alveolus; all the walls are covered with Persian porcelain. Unfortunately, much of this porcelain has fallen, and it has been replaced by a bad plastering. A piece of wall is falling down; another is quite blank. The Arabian carpets have been replaced by the ugliest of our European carpets. On the tables, artificial flowers, covered with a glass globe, remind one of the decorations of our country chimney-pieces. Oh, descendant of Mahomet! Tu quoque! Thou also art seduced by the *soi-disant* European taste. Thou, too, thou preferrest our ugliest old cast-off clothes to the exquisite works of art of thy ancestors. Who, then, indeed, will retain the veneration for these old marvels, the genius of the Arabs had created, the last vestiges of which disappear more and more?

If one is curious to know what becomes of art in the hands of the Turks, let him visit the tombs of the

family of Méhémet-Ali, situated, fortunately, on the opposite side of those of the caliphs. In the centre of a great cemetery, the white tombs of which strike the eyes with blindness, rises a little modern mosque. In a very large chamber, constructed with precious materials, is displayed a confused mass of stelæ, blue, yellow, green, and red, picked out in extraordinary turbans and singular tarbouches, decorated with baskets of flowers daubed with the most flashing colours, and these are joined by heavy garlands of arabesques loaded with colours, the most incongruous and the most ridiculous that were ever seen brought together in so limited a space. The tomb of Ibrahim Pacha, in marble painted black and embellished with gold ornaments, is alone in tolerable good taste. But what a stupid idea to cover beautiful marble with an ugly coat of paint! Imans always prostrate are reciting prayers amid these extravagant tombs, whose form and colour recall tolerably faithfully the little painted houses we give to our children for toys.



## CHAPTER X.

PROMENADES AROUND CAIRO—DONKEYS AND DONKEY-DRIVERS—GHIZEH — FOSTATT— MATARIEH — HELIOPOLIS — THE PYRAMIDS — SAKKARAH—RAIN.

THE promenades in the environs of Cairo are numerous, varied, and easy. Nothing is more charming than to mount one of the asses that stand in troops around the hotels and go on, either to the banks of the Nile, or to Shoubrah, or to Ghizeh, or even still further, to the Pyramids, or to Heliopolis. The asses of Cairo, as it is well known, resemble in no way our European asses. They are race asses, asses of pure blood, carrying proudly their head in the air, caracoling with elegance and galloping swiftly, which enables them, if necessary, to keep pace with the horses and dromedaries. Covered with pretty saddles of various colours, to the pommels of which their bridles are attached in order to oblige them to remain where they are placed, they acquire, through the impossibility of advancing the head, the habit of curving the neck in a bold and graceful manner. It is sufficient

to glance at them to recognize at once that they have always enjoyed great consideration, and that no wretchedness has forced them to contract the step, so stupidly humiliated, of our European donkeys.

Whatever may be said, the character is formed according to the social situation. Disdained by respectable people, occupied with the most ignominious work, and abused, insulted and belaboured with kicks and blows,—from being contemned they are become contemptible; they are stubborn, clumsy, and stupid. But the African asses, which have never failed to be favoured by public esteem, have contracted in a more elevated position very different habits. Mounted in ordinary by pachas and important personages, they are gentle, agile, proud, intelligent, and of a remarkable docility. I said that they keep pace with horses; it is strictly true. I went to the Pyramids on an ass in one hour, and the distance is nearly eight miles. The African asses, therefore, are very valuable. Sincerity, however, compels me to recognize that M. Charles Blanc has rather exaggerated when he alleged in his fine work, "*Voyage de la Haute-Egypte*," that they cost generally from 15,000 to 30,000 francs. Divide the sum by ten and you will be nearer the truth.

To each donkey is attached a donkey-driver, and that is, in my view, the bad side of the donkeys. You must not fancy that you are master over your donkey; it is the donkey-driver who is master of it,

and consequently of you. Never does he take it into his head to ask you if you like to go fast or slow. As for himself, he is always in for a race, and as he runs behind your ass he slyly touches him up with his stick when you least expect it, thereby provoking a formidable start, that infallibly brings down the rider if he is not on his guard. Feeling his tyrant fluttering at his heels from right to left, the ass imitates the movement of ladies when they shake the train of their dress from one side to the other, and this undulatory movement is not at all pleasant. When the driver wants to make the ass go without beating him he utters a plaintive "*Ah!*" like the bravoës the music inspires to an enthusiastic audience. The effect of this prolonged and melancholy note never fails, the ass starts off at a gallop, as if pursued by a phantom. To hold him in, on the contrary, it is necessary to cry out, "*Choye, choye,*" which means nearly, "Easy! easy!" But the rider often cries, "*Choye!*" while the driver cries "*Ah!*" and in this conflict of contradictory exclamations the ass, carried away by his nervous temperament, seldom fails to start off with all the spirit of a race-horse at full speed.

The donkey rides are something delightful, in the morning at sunrise, when the horizon is still bluish, when the lines of the desert, of a pale rose, have not had time to assume the fierce light of day, and when the verdure is humid and brilliant with the night dew. In the daytime you must go to the banks

of the Nile to find a little coolness. One of the most charming rides you can take is that to Ghizeh. When you have passed the village of this name, you follow the river under a row of fine mimosas really enchanting. The banks of the Nile embedded in groves of palm trees and greyish coloured villages, the desert of Hassoun, and in the distance the minarets of Cairo rising in the sky, produce a most captivating spectacle. Elegant canges, charged with Arabs, descending slowly towards the city, or going up to Upper Egypt, leave behind them long yellowish wakes that glitter on the azure hue of the water.

If one has not time enough to wander musingly along the banks of the Nile, he should go to Fostatt, which we call inappropriately old Cairo. Fostatt is surrounded with great walls, like the fortified towns of the Middle Ages. The streets are there narrower and the houses higher than those of Cairo. Therefore, on entering, one experiences the impression of a sort of damp cellar. You hardly find anyone in the streets except a few beggars, who, as soon as they catch a glimpse of you from the furthest corner, rush forward to form your escort. Fostatt is principally inhabited by Copts. It is there one sees an old church of repulsive filthiness, although it contains some admirable woodwork. Underneath is a cave, which has served, they say, the Holy Family as a habitation during its flight in Egypt. How could Jesus and His mother have lived so long in this

terrible den ? I know nothing about it, but they show the oven where St. Joseph baked his bread, the place where the Virgin sat, and even a well, where, according to my guide, the infant Jesus had been baptized. It was in vain that I told him that according to the Gospel, whose authority was indeed of some importance in such a matter, Jesus had been baptized in the Jordan ; he would not give in. There is to be seen also at Fostatt a Greek church, where are some fine porcelain, and a synagogue, in the midst of which is placed an immense tomb, which is, it seems, that of Jeremiah. Poor Jeremiah ! He had reason to weep since he was to be interred in a place so dark and dirty ! I have never so well understood his lamentations as on seeing his tomb. Thus was to be the end of the most rueful of men. It is not only Jeremiah who is interred at Fostatt ; all the Christian cemeteries are united there. The Catholics have no special cemetery, they have hired a portion of the Coptic cemetery. One should go to Egypt to see the "tenant" dead ; I am not sure if their lease will protect them from a sudden eviction.

When one has visited the dwelling of the Holy Family at Fostatt, he easily understands with what delight it must have reposed under the tree of Matarieh, where, according to a pious legend, it stayed before arriving at its gloomy residence. It is an old sycamore that served it as a refuge against the satellites of Herod sent forth in its pursuit. It is

situated in a cool garden, where formerly, balm plants were cultivated, and where are still cultivated very pretty flowers. The Père Vansleb, curé of Fontainebleau, who visited Egypt in 1672, relates thus his excursion in this historical garden: "On the 12th of July I was in company with a few Frenchmen at the village of Matarea, situated on the east side of Cairo, at a distance by the road of about two hours on horseback, to see the places that our Lord Jesus Christ and His very Holy Mother have sanctified by their presence, and at the same time the garden where they planted formerly the balm plant. On entering into the court, you see on the right a little oratory of the Turks, built on the ruins of a little Coptic church, where they venerated some vestiges of our Lord Jesus Christ and His most Holy Mother. It is called *El-Markad*, place of rest. There is in this markad a little reservoir. . . . The Copts have on tradition, that the Holy Virgin had the habit of washing there the linen of her dear Infant, and even that whilst she was occupied at her work, she used to put Him to sleep in a niche which is in the wall of the markad, the spot where the monks formerly devoutly said mass. Quite near this markad is the miraculous well. The tradition of the Copts (and even some Mahometan historians are agreed) is that our Lord washed Himself in this well, and that He communicated by a miracle to its waters their softness and extraordinary virtue. After having

refreshed ourselves in the resting-place, and drunk of that good water with reverence, we entered into the garden. One saw formerly in this garden the sycamore which, according to the tradition of the Copts, had rent itself in two by a miracle to provide a hiding-place for our Lord Jesus Christ and His most Holy Mother, when they were pursued by the soldiers of Herod. They say also that being hidden in this opening, they saved themselves by this means from their hands, by favour of a cobweb that covered them, which seemed very old, though it had been made in an instant, and by a divine miracle." The Père Vansleb is an unbeliever : he seems to suppose that the actual sycamore is not even the one in whose trunk Jesus and His Mother took refuge, hidden from every eye by a miraculous cobweb. I became acquainted, however, at Matarieh, with a simple Irishman, who told me, word for word, "Monsieur, it is just as sure that that is the tree where our Lord Jesus Christ and His most Holy Mother took refuge, as it is sure that we are here, you and I." And he added, "I come from Ireland, I have had a fatiguing journey ; but I regret nothing since I have seen the house of the Holy Family at Fostatt, and the tree of Matarieh. I have taken away a little branch of that tree ; that is well worth all the expense of my journey." A few friends wished to draw him with them into Upper Egypt. "For what object ?" continued he, "nature seems very ugly to me

in Egypt, the public buildings weary me ; I have seen all I wished to see." This Irishman had come to Cairo to take away a little branch of the tree of Matarieh, just as my friend, the naturalist, had come to look for a wild goose. Everyone travels to gratify his own taste.

It is quite close to Matarieh where the solitary obelisk marks the spot where Heliopolis stood. It is covered with hieroglyphics, at present undecipherable, so many wasps having built their nests there. At a short distance, sandhills cover the ruins of this city so celebrated ; a single stone merely now recalls its existence. Like all travellers, I had come to Egypt with my personal tastes and instincts : I did not go there in search of branches of a tree, nor of wild geese ; I did not even seek for subjects of historical studies ; I have much more observed there modern men than antique stones, and it was as a simple amateur that I visited the débris of the past that is met with in the neighbourhood of Cairo. Must I confess it? I did not even enter into the great Pyramid : I limited my excursion to mounting the outside. I must again confess the truth, that I did not go to the end, and that I did not disturb the forty centuries that sleep on its top amid the names of twenty thousand tourists who have thought proper to leave to the forty-first century this souvenir of their passage.

Nothing is done more rapidly than the ascent of



the Great Pyramid ; but you cannot do it as you like ; you are at the mercy of three Arabs who, holding you by each arm, push you on behind with a dizzy rapidity. 'It is in vain that you cry out to them, "*Choye ! choye !*" They are just like the donkeys, they still go at the same pace. Before mounting more than four or five stages I fell from weakness and giddiness. When I came to myself again, I had not three Arabs around me ; I had thirty of them. At the sight of my accident, all those who were below rushed up in a few seconds to my succour. One emptied a gargoulette of water on my head ; another pulled my legs, saying, "I Arab doctor ;" a third fanned me ; a fourth availed himself of the opportunity to offer me some pretended antiquities ; a fifth squeezed violently some orange juice into my mouth, and all cried out to me, "*Backchiche ! Backchiche !*" At the height, and in the state I was, I felt myself at their mercy. I saw at my feet the immense range of steps I had to descend ; beyond, spread out the plain of the Nile, and the minarets of Cairo were glittering in the horizon. I had still enough presence of mind to contemplate the picture of Egypt unfolded before me, but not enough to resist the pillage I was subjected to. At last I requested to start again. I had feared the descent very much ; it is one of the easiest. The plane of the Pyramid is too much inclined for one to feel the slightest giddiness. An Arab unfolds his turban, ties you tightly with it

round the waist, and holding an end in his hands while two others place themselves before you to prevent you from slipping forward, the descent is accomplished. I dare not say the ascent of the Pyramids is a deception; evidently, my complete impartiality would be suspected! Egypt, however, being absolutely level and the Pyramids being situated on a mound of sand, already very elevated, it is easy to understand that the view must be nearly the same from this mound as from the Pyramids themselves. Whether one mounts a little higher or not, it matters little when nothing interrupts the view. Amid the confusion with my Arabs, I observed the spectacle very well that was before me; it was very fine, but, with a slight difference, it was exactly the same one has from the foot of the Pyramids.

To estimate the vastness of these immense masses, it is necessary to see them, not in the middle of the day when they are flooded with light, but in the morning or at sunset. Then, when one is placed at the bottom of the mound of sand which serves them as a base, one is struck with the gigantic dimensions of their lines. A little house, built close beside for the Empress Eugénie, aids the eye in measuring their elevation. One is not overwhelmed with them; but no doubt one is astonished and as if smothered. We feel at this sight that mixture of sentiments and emotions always evoked by an extraordinary spectacle.

Whilst I was thus contemplating the Pyramids, my attention was attracted by a scene which made intelligible the profound and invincible differences that separate the Arab from the fellah. To us, foreigners, all the inhabitants of Egypt are Arabs ; but to the true Arab, the fellah is a vile and inferior being with whom he has as little to do as possible. A fine fellah had glided into a group of Arabs, and he impudently affirmed to me that he himself was an Arab. The others overwhelmed him with sarcasm, declaring that he was a paltry liar. As he persisted in saying he was an Arab, I questioned the Sheik of the tribe, who advanced haughtily. I shall never forget with what air of supreme disdain, without saying a word, without giving himself the trouble to reply, he was pleased with his long staff to remove from his presence the unhappy fellah, who, growing suddenly pale, lowered his head and took himself off without the least murmur, without the slightest attempt at protestation. Then an Arab stepping out of the group explained to me the difference between the Arabs and the fellahs. These latter are merely beasts of burden, that are made to work as one wishes. As to the Arabs, they work very little, lead a wandering life, and indulge themselves as they like. A few women prow around the Pyramids : " Are they Arab women ? " I asked him. He jumped almost in the air. " If they were Arab women," said he, " I would strike them with my own hand. The Arab women

live yonder in the villages, hid behind those walls you see ; but these are only fellah women, who are brazen-faced enough to come and promenade thus around foreigners."\*

I have retained a lively remembrance of the little Pyramids of Sakkarah, which are at some distance from the Pyramids of Ghizeh, in the open desert, by the side of the palm-wood that marks the site of Memphis. It was there, for the first and last time, during five months passed in Egypt, that I have seen any rain for even half an hour ! We were many of us ; it was brilliant sunshine when we left Cairo ; the country was flooded with light, and everything announced a splendid day. We had established ourselves for luncheon in a tomb cut out in the rock in the form of a grotto. All at once the sky was covered with a grey cloud ; the wind blew furiously ; and in less than a minute our table was buried under a thick fall of sand ; glasses, bottles, plates, everything was covered. An Arab, in order to protect us, placed himself at the entrance of the grotto and stretched out with his long arms his mantle on each side, like the wings of a

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\* It will be seen that I say nothing here of the Sphinx, the Temple of the Sphinx, the Necropolis, etc. I desired to avoid in this book the subject of Egyptian antiquities, of which I feared I was not competent to treat. It is a gap I intend to fill up in another book. [This will probably appear early in 1883.—*Note by translator.*] This one contains merely *impressions de voyage*, a little impulsive and hasty perhaps, whose sole merit is truthfulness.

gigantic bat. He was quite serious whilst we roared with laughter at our misadventure. At last this burst of the Kamsin having passed away, we were able to visit the Sérapéum, discovered by Mariette Pacha. I am sorry not to relate, after so many others, the heroic efforts through which our illustrious fellow-countryman has made this discovery, but, to avoid any pretence of erudition, I promised myself to write travels wherein there would be no question of antique monuments. It is one way like another of seeking originality! It suits my ignorance. I cannot help remarking, however, how striking the effect of Sérapéum is, lighted by a series of torches. Let one imagine immense subterranean galleries, in whose walls open at certain distances profound niches, in which are deposited enormous sarcophagi in porphyry of the bull Apis. These sarcophagi are covered with hieroglyphics. One may enter into some of them, the lids of which having been removed with this object, and find himself very comfortable there. Must I admit it, were it only to give an idea of the size of these interior chambers, where certainly the dead body of Apis was at ease, that we waltzed around there several turns? I humbly apologize to Mariette Pacha and to science for so profane a proceeding, to measure the dimensions of a relic doubly sacred! One of the sarcophagi remains in the middle of the gallery; there had been no time to deposit it in its niche. All the walls of the caves were covered with statues and

hieroglyphics, which Mariette Pacha has sent to France, and they may be seen at the Louvre. I cannot regret that we are enriched at the expense of Sakkarah ; yet the aspect of these despoiled walls, where thousands of vacant recesses are seen, produces a very gloomy effect ; it gives the idea of a ruin in a cemetery. Ah ! the Catholic dead of Cairo have reason to be satisfied with a *hired* cemetery, since the sepulchre of the gods *in fee-simple* has not been respected ! Nothing endures, not even tombs !

The sand-hills of Sakkarah are filled with débris of mummies and fragments of pottery, which have served, at a comparatively modern epoch, for sepulchral ceremonies. There, the ruins of many a necropolis, heaped one on another, are trampled over. In the profound silence of nature, amid this human dust mixed with the dust of the desert, in view of the Pyramids that have witnessed so many revolutions and seen so many empires decay and fall, it would be easy to surrender oneself to a sentiment, almost unconquerable, of philosophic melancholy. But when one goes to Sakkarah in a pleasure party, he does not meditate much ! In the direction of Sérapéum, we admired several tombs, that of Ti in particular, a great personage who had the walls of his mortuary chapel covered with charming hieroglyphics representing all the scenes of his life. It is a play in twenty different acts, and in which the personages after so many centuries have preserved all the clearness of their

drawing and all the delicacy of their colours ; one might say that they came quite fresh from the chisel of the sculptor and the brush of the painter.

When we left the tomb of Ti it rained heavily. At Cairo it had rained in torrents, and the city on our return was nothing but a vast swamp. It was the second and last rain of winter. It does not often rain at Cairo, as we see ; but then, when it does, what a deluge ! At every torrent a great many houses fall down, the stories are precipitated, the one on the other, and the unhappy tenants regard the destruction with stupefaction. The mud which is employed in the buildings becomes saturated, and everything crumbles away. As to the streets, which are nowhere paved, and where the dust is prodigious, they are transformed into running rivers of mud. In order to pass from one foot-way to another it is necessary to mount the shoulders of the Arabs astraddle, who are delighted to offer you these services for the most trifling remuneration. These living bridges are very convenient. It is by the same process you get into the Sarcophagi of the Apis—by mounting on another's shoulders. And this is the reason why the greatest philanthropists, when they sojourn in Egypt, discover, at last, that it is very natural for one to get on by trampling on his fellow-creatures.

## CHAPTER XI.

LIFE IN CAIRO—SLAVERY—MOHAMMED-EL-HINDY  
—PARISIAN LIFE IN EGYPT UNDER ISMAÏL PACHA  
—THE ARTS.

ONE must like Oriental life, long musing and endless contemplations, to be pleased long at Cairo. In a week or a fortnight you can see everything remarkable in this city ; but if one desires to inspire himself with its spirit, and analyze its seductive charm, long months will not be too much. As for me, I have passed five months there in almost complete inaction, without a moment of ennui, without regretting the European activity which one shakes off so quickly under a drowsy climate.

The actual amusements of Cairo are, however, very little varied. To visit for the hundredth time the Khan-Khalil, to repose in the shades of the Esbekieh, to join a donkey party along the Nile, to go to see the sunset from the top of the hill of the Mokattam, to wander without object in the narrow streets that never end, to pass entire hours in contemplating a bit of architecture, a picturesque group, a delicious



assemblage of colours, etc.: what can there be more monotonous in appearance? But if one has imagination and his head filled with Oriental fancies, if he is pursued by the souvenirs of the Thousand and One Nights, if, moreover, his mind is excited by the observation of a world quite new, he will not perceive time dragging its slow length along; it slips by without leaving a trace; days succeed other days, and when he wishes to render an account of the time spent during a week, he will often perceive, after a rigorous examination of conscience, that he has been occupied in nothing else than a palm, whose crown was waving in the breeze, or in a particular colour, that came every day at the same hour to suffuse with its delicate tints the distant undulations of the wide desert.

Sometimes, however, the amusements are more original. I esteem as one of the best spent of all the days I passed at Cairo, when I made an interminable visit to Mohammed-Gaafar-el-Hindy, the most agreeable, no doubt, of all the bazaar dealers in precious stones. I had gone astray with two friends in search of the bazaar of the Soudan, which is filled, it appears, with elephants' teeth and ostrich feathers, and where may be found also, after well searching, slaves, whose sale, prohibited by English philanthropy, is surrounded by the most mysterious precautions. To say a word *en passant*, English philanthropy takes a wrong road here, as it happens,

moreover, but too often. Though the manufacture of eunuchs has been interdicted, and the manufacturers even threatened with the penalty of death. Well and good! Still one does not understand very clearly how they can dispense with eunuchs, whilst the harems are allowed to subsist. But slavery in Egypt is a thing so gentle, so natural, so useful and prolific, that its complete disappearance there would be a real evil. The day when the savage tribes of central Africa will no longer be able to sell the captives they make in their wars, and will not be willing to *feed them* gratuitously, it is clear that they will *feed on them*; they will eat them. Now if slavery is a crying evil that brings a blush to the cheek of humanity, it nevertheless appears far preferable to anthropophagy, at least, when we place ourselves from the point of view of the *eaten*. And yet there are certainly some English philanthropists who find it more consistent with human dignity that the blacks should be swallowed by their neighbours, rather than be brought under a foreign yoke, under which their liberty is crushed. I have consulted in this matter a certain number of the interested, and I must say, so weak is human nature, that they were all of the same opinion. I will refer in particular to a fine negro, with teeth of ivory, who had known in his youth the vicissitudes of savage life. I proposed to him, jokingly, to serve me as a guide among the Niams-Niams. His black face almost changed colour ;

it was in vain that I offered him heaps of gold : for all the wealth of the Indies he would not have consented to expose himself to the danger of serving as a supper to one of his old neighbours. Well, what would you have? These coarse people have not the sentiment of their native nobility. Servitude is not repulsive to them; it is so very light in Egypt. Slaves there are treated like children of the family ; they have almost nothing to do ; they indulge themselves in a tranquil life without suspecting for a moment the horror of their situation. It is not merely the great proprietors, the pachas, who have slaves ; the least petty shopkeeper of the Mousky has them also. One day when I went to dine familiarly with one of these traders, I admired his son, a child of four or five, who was eating gravely an apple. All at once he got tired of his apple ; then with the air of a man long accustomed to command, he made an authoritative and disdainful sign to a negro of the same age as himself ; the latter advances immediately, his head humbly bent, and relieves his young master of what troubled him. This scene between the two infants that could hardly walk, made me clearly understand how precocious could be the sentiment of social inequality. The tradesman's child did not even look at the slave to whom he gave his orders ; the slave, on the contrary, did not cease to keep his eyes on the son of the shopkeeper ; but both seemed quite satisfied with their condition, and I am quite sure

that the little nigger liked better to pick up apples half nibbled away, of which he might still have a good mouthful, than to risk being devoured himself as quickly as an apple.

We left off at the bazaar of Soudan, which we were looking for, and we passed continually through wide doors, ornamented with all kinds of arabesques, into the gloomy and dilapidated okkels. These okkels, that serve as a rendezvous for the merchants, are invariably composed of a great court, in the middle of which stands a little wooden mosque, where they may perform their devotions without interfering with their business. Along the court extends a balcony, upon which open doors that give access into the chambers let to each merchant. Great sacks lying on the floor, or a few chests, contain the merchandise. After having visited ten or twelve okkels, we found one that appeared cleaner than the others. Its court was long, narrow, and bordered with arches rather elegant, though well darkened with age. At the bottom of this court, in a little garden of flowers, a personage in Indian costume was writing on a mahogany desk. It was Mohammed-Gaafar-el-Hindy, a very agreeable man of Indian origin, but who had travelled a great deal, and had even been, during the great universal exhibition, in Paris, where he accomplished, according to his own account, on leaving the "bal Bullier," exploits that recall the most justly famous of the labours of Hercules. As soon as he

saw us in the furthest distance, Mohammed-Gaafar, abandoning his invoices, came towards us with his long white shirt, his red tarbouche, and his vest of an original cut. He expressed himself in a composite language formed of Turkish, Arabic, Hindostani, English, French, Greek, Italian, and a few other dialects; but on uniting our philological knowledge, we succeeded in understanding and in being understood. Our visit, though accidental, gave him the greatest joy. He made us sit down on fine carpets; his slaves served us with coffee and raky, and brought us the narghilli and chibouque. Whilst relating to us his travels and his gallant prowess, Mohammed-Gaafar was happy in laying out before us his riches. He presented to our view rubies, Persian sabres, ladies' garments in precious stuffs, napkins embroidered in gold, and old Indian manuscripts magnificently illuminated. Delighted with his reception, we desired, in order to make some return for it, to purchase from him some objects; but he cried out with indignation, "You are my guests, you are not mere buyers. Besides, if anything here pleases you, take it; I offer it to you with all my heart, but I do not sell it to you." And he left us, in fact, with the most valuable merchandise in our hands with entire confidence, whilst he went away to look for more to show us. When we had finished smoking, he perfumed our beards and hair with perfumes of the value of twenty-five francs for thirty grains—perfumes so powerful,

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that after a week's soaping the odour still clung to me.

Mohammed-Gaafar's shop was a little dark room where it was difficult for three persons to move about. It was laden with precious things, and frightful European trinkets. Beside a splendid Persian banner hung a ridiculous portrait of Victor Emanuel ; a fine view of Mecca was opposite to a horrible lithograph representing President Lincoln ; a gilt clock in the worst taste stood at the bottom of the room. We had passed nearly four hours, without perceiving it, in the little garden of Mohammed-Gaafar amid his treasures, his perfumes, and his flowers, listening with pleasure to his child-like and charming stories. We should have remained there still longer if the twilight had not warned us that the day was finishing, and that we should not abuse anything, even Oriental hospitality.

The shop of Mohammed-Gaafar gives a pretty exact idea of the luxury of the Orientals, of that mixture of native splendour with European tawdriness which represents to them the height of good taste. It is in the harems, I am told, that these incongruous effects are especially striking. Large halls in marble, set around with admirable divans brilliant with gold and precious stones, are filled with furniture and hangings which they sell at a cheap rate at the *Bon Marché* or the *Magasins du Louvre* to foreigners and rich country people of France. The widow of Saïd Pacha, the most remarkable woman in all Egypt, has, it seems, a

magnificent salon, and of an ornamentation relatively judicious; but on the principal wall may be noticed as the finest decoration a picture of Epinal, painted in gorgeous colours, representing the Duc d'Orleans and the Princesse Hélène smiling at the Comte de Paris slumbering in his cot. The ladies' dresses are of the same character as the furniture. The materials are very rich, but the shape spoils everything. They are generally robes without cut, upon which are put those vile corsages that were formerly called caracos. Under this costume, the figure of the houris of the harems reminds one tolerably well of that of cooks in their Sunday finery. Sometimes, however, the caraco disappears, especially when the dress is low. This low dress is very low. It is not uncommon to see the wife of a pacha or a great personage wearing a dress "*décolletée en carré*," as our reviews of the fashions say; but the square in question is a long quadrilateral which, starting from the neck, extends to the waist. It is the opposite to the fashion of the almes, whose *décolletage* parts from the waist, while the chest is relatively covered.

During the good times of the reign of Ismaïl Pacha, the travellers who passed their winter at Cairo were not obliged to be satisfied by way of amusement with sauntering in the bazaars and visits to the Indian merchants. Cairo had cafés-concerts, a circus, a French theatre, an opera with a *corps de ballet* not less remarkable, I have been informed, than that of Paris.

The Opera was built in a few months, and the walls have about the same strength as those of the oldest mosques. The interior is very rich ; the machinery, decorations, and costumes would eclipse those of our finest theatres. As for me, I must admit that the Opera of Cairo inspires me with much veneration. I should never have the courage to speak of it with irony. It is there that was played for the first time *Aida*, the *chef-d'œuvre* of Verdi and one of the *chefs-d'œuvre* of dramatic music. The defiling of the march was marvellous. The tallest and finest Nubians of the army had been put in requisition as figurants, and it is said that these dumb actors, who had no need of masks to play their *rôle*, defiled with imposing carriage to the sound of one of the finest triumphal marches that has ever been composed. Let us not be too severe against Ismaïl Pacha, since we are indebted to him for *Aida*. It is not that he understood much of the work that he had got composed. The pachas understood much less of it than he did.

I have already mentioned that European music was but a disagreeable row for Egyptian ears. What does it signify ? The pachas were obliged to admire officially, just as the Nubians to figure officially. Ismaïl had ordered each of them to hire a box in order to sustain the opera, which, nevertheless, cost an enormous subsidy to the public treasury. The pachas had hired the boxes, but they took none for their money ; they preferred leaving their places



empty to submitting to the tediousness of listening to fine music. It was not, moreover, the sole sacrifice they had been obliged to make to the progress of the fine arts. It was necessary to maintain the *corps de ballet* also, and that was one more undertaking imposed on the pachas. Each of them, according to his fortune, had to undertake to assure the well-being to one, two, three, and even four artistes. It is affirmed, it is true, that they acquitted themselves with more pleasure of this second part of their task than of the first. The Khedive had gallantly given the example, and certain pachas followed him so merrily, that they manifested, on this particular point, evident taste for European civilization. The ladies of the harems, from their railed-in boxes, assisted at the triumph of their rivals. During a few years the light chronicle of Cairo fed itself in this matter, on the most amusing stories, Cairo seemed transformed into an immense Jardin Mabille. They used to sup at the Pyramids by moonlight, after the representation of *Aida* or *La Belle Hélène*, and breakfast at Sakkarah. The dahabiehs on the Nile recalled the boats of Bougival, and often, oh sacrilege! has the champagne exploded amid the Tombs of the Caliphs, without the spirit of Kayt-Bey or of the Sultan Barkouk appearing, in order to protest against such a profanation of architecture, religion, and the laws of the harem!

There remains nothing more of that "*vie inimit-*

able," of a new kind, that would not have shocked Cleopatra, and would have enraptured Anthony with its gross sensuality. The Opera is closed,\* the brilliant costumes of *Aida*, the arms and apparel, composed from the instructions of Mariette Pacha in person, are relegated to the lumber room; the circus serves as a stable for the Viceroy;† the caf  s-concerts are replaced by Arabian caf  s, and the French theatre opens no longer its doors but at rare intervals.

This winter, however, an Arabian company gave its representations at the French theatre, and I have been so delighted myself that I have not regretted an instant the loss of the former vaudevilles and comedies. The principal piece of the season was a tragedy, by an author of some merit, called Racine, who flourished under some caliph, whose name I forget, and who, in his line, was certainly as good as MM. Meilhac and Hal  vy. It was called "*Les Fr  res ennemis*," and they looked on there at the misfortunes of those two sons of   dipus, whose intestine quarrels have drawn tears from the whole civilized world. The actors were not absorbed in their parts in such a way as did not admit their stopping now and then in the middle even of a tirade, to turn towards the

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\* It has been re-opened, but for the performance of the operetta, the only kind within reach of the natives and the majority of Europeans.

† The Circus is now destroyed, like all other ephemeral works of Ismail Pacha.

Viceroy's box, and drone out, in honour of the pacha a song, accompanied with a most singular movement of the head. At the end, when Eteocles and Polynices, who bore, moreover, Arabic names, die in a way so tragical, the orchestra, seized by some unknown tardy scruple for literary propriety, or perhaps some inopportune regard for local colouring, briskly struck up the "*Marseillaise*." It was, perhaps, one way of indicating that the piece was of French origin. The two brothers fell to the sounds of "*Un sang impur*."

After the tragedy came the comedy. Borrowed from the stock plays of the Palais Royal, it had for its subject the misfortunes of a railway stoker, surprising his wife in the very act of treason. But the Arabs have too great a regard for the dignity of art to bring before a large audience the misfortunes, more or less lamentable, of a simple railway stoker. They had, therefore, replaced him by an Italian general as a Roman senator, which permitted, no doubt, as to his position and nationality. I have never seen anything more comic than this general-senator, in the critical scene of the *dénouement*, holding his sword like a wax-taper over the heads of the guilty. He certainly had not the look of threatening them with death.

We thus see that Arabic art has strangely profited by our school, and that the efforts of Ismaïl Pacha to acclimatize French literature in Egypt have produced marvellous effects.

## CHAPTER XII.

### 'TOLERATION—THE DERVISHES.

EGYPT is anything but an intolerant country.\* The Copts, who, as is well known, are Christians, have always lived there on complete equality with the Mussulmans. In fact, they have never ceased to be oppressed, first by the Arabs, then by the Turks ; but the fellahs have not had a different lot ; and the Copts, a race clever, sharp, artful, and unyielding, have allowed themselves to be much less trampled

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\* This assertion may, perhaps, appear rather too positive and emphatic, after the massacre of Alexandria and the catastrophes that called forth the expedition under Sir Garnet Wolseley. My belief, however, in its conformity to fact remains unshaken. The fanaticism the Mussulmans succeeded in provoking, wholly for the occasion, has been neither sincere nor profound ; therefore it has subsided with astonishing rapidity after the crushing defeat of Arabi's army at Tel-el-Kebir. The Arabs are actually children ; they have been allowed to dazzle their imagination with gleams of false hopes, with the dream of self-government—of deposing the Khedive, driving away the Europeans, and usurping the power themselves. They really believed, one moment, they were going to be the absolute masters of Egypt, and were about to succeed to all the riches of the Europeans. It was these ideas that stimulated their fury.

on than the latter. From this habit of living among Christians, the Mussulmans have acquired a spirit of toleration which the gentleness of the native character has singularly developed. When the Europeans penetrated into Egypt in a decisive manner, when, under Méhémet-Ali, they exercised great public functions, when, under his successors, they gradually took possession of the commerce and a part of the property, they never had to encounter before them the obstacle of religious passions, which in other parts of the East has so often stopped their career. "In Turkey," said to me, one day, Ismaïl Pacha, with a felicity of expression which is not rare with him, "In Turkey, the Christians are tolerated, but with contempt; in Egypt, they are tolerated with con-

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They massacred the Christians, not as Christians, *but as proprietors*, in order that they might be assured they would never return to claim the goods, of which they fondly hoped to dispossess them in so thorough a manner. The religious sentiment formed but a very feeble ingredient in the composition of these demoniacal orgies. The pacification, therefore, has been very prompt, and has not had the misfortune to be exposed to those shocks and explosions that are always produced, even after defeat, by true fanaticism. I therefore maintain what I have said regarding the toleration of the Egyptians. This toleration, which has been hardening into a habit for now nearly a century of constant intercourse with Europeans, may have suffered a momentary suspension, but has never disappeared. It is in their blood, and too much in harmony with the instinctive meekness of their nature, to leave room to any fear that it should ever completely change and die out.

sideration." And as a battalion was passing in the Place d'Abdin at the moment he was thus speaking to me, "Look at that battalion," added he; "there are there Arabs and Copts, Mussulmans and Christians, that march in the same rank. I assure you that not one of them troubles himself about his comrade's religion. Equality between them is complete." Ismaïl Pacha was right; and it was unfortunate enough for him that he attempted later to create in Cairo a fanaticism that has never existed there. Personally, he is profoundly sceptic. He hardly, if ever, during his reign, fulfilled officially the precepts of the Mussulman law. He never put himself out of the way, in the presence, not only of Europeans, but Arabs, in violating the fast of the Ramadan. As to the great religious fêtes, he excused himself ordinarily from taking any part in them. A great number of pachas are not more respectful than he is of the precepts of Mahomet, but they are more discreet. One of them, a great smoker, in taking a drive with a Christian secretary during the Ramadan, "Put your head at the window and smoke quite openly," said he, "that I may do it at my ease behind you." Méhémet-Ali at first was far from being a perfect devotee. In 1825, the overflowing of the Nile not having attained its ordinary height, he ordered public prayers in all the temples, without distinction of worship. "Among so many religions," he remarked with irony, "it would be very un-

fortunate if there were not a single one good for anything."

From the earliest times, Egyptian Mahometanism has been relaxed by a sort of eclectic moderation similar to that of Méhémet-Ali. Ahmed-ébn-Touloun, finding himself on the point of death, invited the Jews to read the Pentateuch and the Psalms, and the Christians the Gospel for him in their respective places of worship, whilst the Mussulmans recited on their part the Koran in the mosques. He thought, no doubt that, in order to be sure of finding the good religion, it was wise to try them all. That did not prevent him, it is true, from gasping out at last, "There is no other God than God, and Mahomet is his prophet." At any rate, he had surely set himself right with the other religions. His son Khomarouyah did not hesitate, as we have related, to embellish his palace with magnificent statues, in spite of the most formal precepts of the Koran, which interdict the reproduction of the human form. The present Khedive, Tewfik Pacha, though putting his religion in practice conscientiously, kept up at his expense, when he was simply hereditary prince, a school of young people, where they were taught to draw the head and the entire human body. There are with the law means of accommodation. In Egypt Mahometanism has not that inflexibility, that spirit of exclusion, that blind submission to the letter, which renders it elsewhere incompatible with any progress.

But that is not saying that the Egyptians are unbelievers, free-thinkers, and Voltairians. They are certainly not. Those even who appear to be the most profoundly impregnated with the modern spirit preserve, nevertheless, an old leaven of faith that nothing can destroy. Still it is not a fanatic, exclusive, and fervent faith. A great number of Mussulmans put their children with the Brethren of the Christian Doctrine in order to learn French under them. These children learn besides, during the four or five years their studies continue, to worship in two or three languages, all the saints of Paradise, and to celebrate in all sorts of compositions the beauties of the Catholic church ; a few follow from pleasure the classes of the Catechism, and make it a sort of point of honour to take down the Christians in it. But do not imagine that, on leaving these places, they retain anything else of this Catholic education than the remembrance of an agreeable occupation. For having long jabbered over the *Pater*, they recite with not less fervour the verses of the Koran. The gentleness of manners, the general urbanity of the mind, permit these compromises, so contrary to the ordinary customs of Islamism. In spite of all, the Mussulman faith is sincere. One would not find in all Egypt ten actual unbelievers. The kind of scepticism with which the Christian nations are all more or less invaded is unknown to the Mahomedan nations. Nothing shakes in



their hearts that unalterable basis of religious sentiment.

One is constantly surprised to see men brought up in Europe, having all the outward appearances not only of the European, but of the most jeering Parisian, and giving, in ordinary life on moral and philosophical questions, proofs of a mind free from all prejudice, suddenly show themselves imbued with the grossest superstition of their race and their religion. I remember the strange impression produced on me by a native magistrate of the reformed tribunals, who had passed his law studies in Paris, and who seemed to have availed himself as liberally as possible of the life of the Parisian boulevards. He had just lost his daughter. "Can you understand it?" said he to me, with a look of profound astonishment, "that her mother and her aunts have accomplished pilgrimages to several tombs of *santons*, they have made considerable gifts to the spinning and howling dervishes, and yet the poor child is dead!"

Even with the most civilized man, however little one rubs off the modern polish, he finds then again the Mussulman, if not really believing at least superstitious. The external forms, the neglect of the precepts of the Koran, the violation of the rules of the law signify but little; no profound doubt has entered into the mind; the scepticism is entirely superficial. But this persistent internal faith, which especially arises from the complete absence of the

scientific and critical mode of thought in persons apparently the best informed, is accompanied, I repeat, with a toleration almost respectful towards the other religions. The people have no hatred for the infidel. Nothing would be easier, if this hatred were in their hearts, than to express it by violence. The travellers who venture into the labyrinthine streets of Cairo get constantly into blind alleys, surrounded on all sides by ruins, in which dwell a few poor families. The feeling of isolation one experiences in such places is painful. One feels as if he were cut off from the world, so separated is he from the populous streets by innumerable labyrinths that wind round and round, and where the most experienced lose themselves over and over again. Undoubtedly, if any fanatic Mussulman desired to take vengeance against a Christian, he would merely have to wait for him in one of these solitary and silent blind alleys to maltreat him with impunity.

At the time when Ismaïl Pacha caused to be announced by his intimate friends a general massacre of the Christians, it often happened to me to lose myself in these cut-throat places, the deserted and mysterious aspect of which, when one has not seen them, is impossible to conceive. I involuntarily asked myself, either when I passed a figure of rather ferocious look, or when I saw something around me moving under the heaps of rubbish, or when the door of a house opened to let out a negro of stern phy-

siogonomy, what could hinder one of these so-called slayers, whose cruelty I have constantly heard deplored, from exercising his fanaticism on some belated traveller in one of these ruined suburbs of Cairo. He would only have had to hide his victim afterwards under some ruin, where certainly no person would have come to search for him. How could one have suspected what had become of him? But I have never had here the least tendency to personal fear. In the quarters purely Arab, a foreigner who wears a hat often finds himself called *nasara*, which signifies simply Christian; and *kamsir*, which is the Arabic name of an animal whose French name does not precisely mean cleanliness; but in what country are not foreigners exposed to epithets of the same kind? Some children occasionally throw stones at you. One of them even threatened me one day with both hands full of crude, culinary fuel, but it was sufficient to raise my stick at him to dissipate these tendencies to fanaticism, assuredly not very agreeable, still not very dangerous.

If the Egyptian people are not intolerant, that does not prevent them from being perfectly devout. They are so without the least human respect. One constantly meets with honest sort of people occupied in saying their prayers, either in the public gardens, or on the footways, or in the shops of the bazaars. The Arab prayer, as one knows, is one of the most original exercises, beginning with ablutions and continuing

with a series of prostrations accompanied by a few short words. Custom requires that one should choose the cleanest spot, where he happens to be, to execute this pantomime. In the gardens the fellahs place themselves on the coolest parts of the lawn ; in the streets they spread out before them their handkerchief, if they have one, which is something extraordinary, and if they have not one, their turban or any rag considered clean that comes to hand. Nothing is more curious than to see grave-looking traders, confined in the little square spaces that serve them as shops, and where they have hardly room to stand upright, get up, bow down, and prostrate themselves in reverentially turning towards Mecca in the midst of the circulating crowd and customers, who stop to look at the merchandise, but take care not to disturb the faithful in their devotion. The canal that passes through Cairo, and then on to Ismalia, is actually an open-air mosque. It is so convenient to come there and perform one's ablutions, that one is naturally induced afterwards to say there his prayers. Most of the faithful find it easier to bathe entirely than to wash their arms up to their elbows and their legs up to their knees. Therefore, one never passes near the canal without finding on both its banks a great many men, black and olive-coloured, entirely naked. It is difficult to imagine a sight more interesting to a sculptor. No museum contains finer specimens of human nature. One might fancy that all these

bathers were admirable statues of bronze or ebony come down from their pedestals to exhibit their perfect forms in the most brilliant light. After the bath comes the prayer. Great straw mats are laid out for this purpose on stone platforms arranged around the bridges. In the evening, at the approach of twilight, when the fiery light of the sunset is succeeded by the pale yellowish tints that melt away on a violet background, it is an admirable picture—this scene of public prayer in the sight of Heaven. About thirty men arranged in two lines rise and bow in cadence, whilst one of them, who acts the part of mouezzin, chants with a shrill voice in a manner melancholy and poetic, the everlasting refrain: "*Allahou akbar. Achhadou anla ilaha illallah. Achadou anna Mohammada rasouloullah. Hei ia alassalah. Hei ia alfélah. Allahou akbar. La ilaha illallah.*" (God is great. I confess there is no other God but God. I confess that Mahomet is God's prophet. Come to the prayer. Come to benediction. God is great. There is no other God than God)." On the right, a few villages disappear under the palms; on the left, the minarets of Boolak, the port of Cairo, stand out like light spires against the dull background of the sky; the shadows darken little by little, the noise dies away, the voice only of the mouezzin resounds amid the silence—a last accent of religious thought rising to God, a final and touching echo of the closing day.

After having been present at the ordinary prayer, if you desire to contemplate the pious exercises of the dervishes nothing is easier. The convent of howling dervishes is situated on the road to Old Cairo. You cross a pretty court shaded with large trees and surrounded with the cells of the dervishes; you enter into an old mosque, whose walls are covered with a few rusty spears, taken perhaps from the soldiers of St. Louis. There, a score of men crouching on their knees swing their heads, sometimes from right to left, sometimes up and down, chanting, "*La ilah il Allah ou a Mohammed ressoul Allah!*" A sheik placed opposite the niche, that indicates the direction of Mecca, presides at the ceremony. Gradually the movement quickens to the interminable formula, "*La illah,*" etc., succeeded by a simple "*Ah!*" that seems to come from the depths of the chest; the dervishes rise, uncover their foreheads, and let drop a long lock of hair which touches the ground every time they bow the upper part of the body, just as they had recently bowed their heads. An orchestra composed of drums, cymbals, and nameless instruments, marks the measure violently. It is the moment of religious paroxysm. Their bodies break out in a fearful trembling, their heads strike the ground, their cries become piercingly shrill. Soon nothing more is heard than harsh hiccoughs and wild, inarticulate howlings, that overwhelm the noise of the music. One dervish, more excited than the others, rushes into the middle of the circle to

execute a tangled waltz. In this uproar and general commotion the sheik alone preserves his wits. When he considers the experience is sufficient he gives the signal to depart. Each then dresses again, and these men, who a few moments ago seemed to have reached the last extremity of nervous excitement, come and sit down calm and smiling under the pleasant shades of their court, where they gallantly offer coffee to the English ladies, spectators of their mad operations.

To calm yourself a little after the howling dervishes, you should go and see the spinning dervishes. With these the scene is as pretty as it was horrible and disgusting with the others. In a sort of round hall freshly painted, that might be taken for the salle of a suburban dancing-hall, ten men clad in jackets of various colours and those Persian hats in brown felt which have been justly compared with flower-pots reversed, and long skirts of the same colour that descend to the ankle, their feet being naked, are ranged in line against a partition. Their sheik places himself at their head, crying, "*La ilah il Allah ou Mohammed ressoul Allah!*" Then he stops in front of the niche that indicates the direction of Mecca. Then the dervishes advance one by one, their arms crossed on their chests, bow profoundly to the sheik, extend their arms, incline lightly their heads as if in a gentle rapture, and begin to waltz with elegance. Their skirts, the lower extremity of which is weighted

by a thick hem, inflate with wind. Two little flutes and a tarabook execute a kind of waltz, slow and original, which some singers accompany with a bass psalmody of a charming effect. All at once the flutes send forth a shrill note. All the dervishes stop at once and place themselves in line; their sheik again puts himself at their head, goes round the hall with them, then takes his post and the scene recommences. At last the dervishes squat down, putting themselves again in line, and shout twice a formidable "*Ah!*" then they depart one by one saluting the sheik. When the latter, who has remained almost immovable during the ceremony, and who, doubtlessly, has felt his feet tingle with the dancing rage, finds himself alone, he executes in his turn a few solitary rounds of waltz, in assuming inspired airs. Everything is simple, picturesque, delicate, and elegant. I cannot understand why no composer has yet had the idea to form a ballet of spinning dervishes. In truth, it would be a ballet without women, and yet at least it would not be without petticoats! The original music would produce on the theatre a delightful and exquisite effect. As to the *ensemble* of the tableau, no ballet could have presented one more startling and more graceful.\*

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\* The 'dervishes are not true monks in the Christian and Western sense of the word. Mahomet proscribed convents. "As to monastical life," says he (Book vii., § 27), "it is they



(the Christians) who have invented it." But in the East, such is the attraction of a contemplative existence, that Mussulmans desirous of surrendering themselves to it, have got over the difficulty by means of another sentence of the Prophet, "Poverty makes my glory." From the first centuries of Islamism, *tékies* or convents rose everywhere, and thanks to the munificence of the faithful, they took gradually a very great development. There are profound differences between the monastic life of the Mussulman pilgrim and that of the Christian. Islamism admits the monastic orders; it rejects absolutely the cloister. The dervishes not merely live in the world, they exercise there most of the time a manual profession. One only of their numerous orders tolerates mendicity; all the other dervishes are devoted to a trade; some are fishermen, others tailors, tent-makers, saddlers, papooch makers. They naturally choose as much as possible a peaceful vocation; but idleness, the pure mystic life, is banished carefully from their institutions.

The essential difference between the convent and the *tékieh* is, that the latter does not condemn the dervish to loneliness, sequestration and celibacy; it authorizes him to pass the night in his own dwelling, though custom requires that he should come and share sometimes the couch of his brethren. It is not uncommon to meet with married dervishes and very good fathers of a family. They may be constantly seen mixing among the crowd, from which they are not always distinguished by their costume. I have often remarked on one of the principal boulevards of Cairo the spinning dervishes, their heads covered with their strange caps, smoking, drinking, and playing cards with the first comer in the popular cafés. The *tékieh* is merely a place of assemblage, where the members of the congregation arrive on certain days and hours in order to give themselves up together to their devotions, customs, religious dances, macerations, prayers, and to the reading and copying of the Koran. It is from the *tékieh* that are produced a few of those splendid manuscripts of the Koran that are worthy of being placed beside our finest missals of the Middle Ages. All dervishes are not slovenly

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and ignorant mohks; they work not merely with their feet and their hands; they work also with their heads. Several of their sheiks have been men of rare abilities, doctors remarkable in theology and jurisprudence, and very often their cells and the courts of their convents are transformed into schools where those who seek instruction come from all parts.

## CHAPTER XIII.

THE RETURN OF THE SACRED CARPET OF MECCA—  
THE ANNIVERSARY OF THE PROPHET'S BIRTH—  
THE DOSSEH.

THE return of the Sacred Carpet from Mecca, the anniversary of the birth of the Prophet, and the Dosseh, follow each other at intervals of a few days. All these fêtes together last generally two weeks; but they have been prolonged this year from political circumstances. It was at the moment, when the pilgrims arrived from Mecca, that a riot of officers broke out at Cairo, and Ismail Pacha tried to persuade Europe that the lives of the Christians were threatened by Mussulman fanaticism. In order to take apparent measures of precaution against an imaginary danger, he delayed a week the solemn entry of the carpet. Sensible people never believed a moment in this danger, but the threat nevertheless, contributed to spread over these Mussulman fêtes a certain vague fear, the emotion of which excited the passionate character they naturally have. Before coming into Cairo, the pilgrims encamp in the open desert near the barracks of Abassieh, opposite to the Tombs of the Caliphs. It was there for the first time

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that I saw their strange and picturesque caravan. Their tents were pitched in a circle around a little green pavilion, containing the sacred carpet which, after having remained a year over the tomb of the Prophet, is brought into Egypt, to be there cut up into pieces, and then distributed as amulets to the faithful. Camels covered with dust, their heads almost between their legs, lean and enfeebled with fatigue, looked as if they were artistically disposed in groups by the hands of a painter. Under the tent, pilgrims of all nations, negroes, Syrians, Circassians, Turks, Arabs, Moghrebins, burnt by the sun, as lean and exhausted as their camels, women hardly veiled and whose features were distorted by efforts too long sustained, were all patiently waiting the authorization to enter Cairo. Among them moved about Albanian Bashi-bazouks,\* wearing high felt hats, grey costumes whitened by the dust of the desert, and belts furnished with pistols, displaying fierce eyes and savage looks. It is these Bashi-bazouks that compose the escort of the caravan who should defend it against the pillaging Arabs. These gendarmes have all the appearance of, and are themselves, in fact, true

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\* I should mention that I have often seen the return of the Holy Carpet since these lines were written without again seeing any Bashi-bazouks. They had been placed there in 1879 by the Khedive Ismail Pacha to terrify the Europeans, but they do not ordinarily escort the caravan and enter with it into Cairo.

bandits. In the shade of the camels a few pilgrims were telling some long stories to the crowd that pressed in to listen to them. Some horses, real skeletons, were wandering about at random, and seemed to enjoy for the first time a little coolness under a sun, inexorable to me, but lenient to them in comparison with that which had blazed over their heads during a long and painful journey.

The day of the entry of the carpet, an immense wave of the population flows towards the encampment of the pilgrims ; they strike their tents ; guns are fired off in every direction ; a violent clamour rises in the air ; the desert disappears under the colours of thousands of costumes that flare in the midday sun. The procession at last begins to march. I had gone, in order to see it file off, into a Jewish house, of French protégés. There were only women there, all trembling with the notion that a general massacre of non-Mussulmans was going to be the crowning work of the ceremony. The windows half-closed, looked out on a narrow street, where the crowd was so dense, that it was difficult to see how it could be contained in the space. Then it overflowed the walls, the houses, and even the roofs. At every window appeared heads of women, black, copper-coloured and white, encircled with many coloured head-dresses. Dealers in preserved fruits, almond cakes, sorbets, exhibitors of monkeys, psylles, and mountebanks, found means of piercing this confused

and motley mass, which the police constantly drove back with strokes of the courbache. After some hours' waiting, salvoes of artillery burst forth from the citadel, and the procession appeared. Never has a cortège more varied been presented to the eye.

At the head marches military bands, and a few battalions of Nubian soldiers all in white, keeping step with solemnity. Then comes the endless series of the religious corporations of Cairo ; each of which, preceded by a green or red flag, is accompanied by a long group of devout personages, howling with fury verses of the Koran. The softas, the students of El-Azhar, make themselves conspicuous by the elegant manuscripts they hold in their hands. Now and then appears a saint, a *santon* inspired with the Spirit of God, and who marches only supported between two disciples, for the religious intoxication with which he is seized, hinders him from directing his steps. Dervishes are giving themselves heavy blows on the chest, or turning round and round frantically. At last comes the carpet, borne on a splendid dromedary, escorted by Bashi-bazouks, with looks more ferocious than ever, and then the pilgrims, whose rags attest how hard the journey has been for them.

This carpet is a sort of canopy in red velvet, embroidered with gold. It is wonderfully rich, and it takes a whole year to produce it. A carpet is hardly sent out, when they begin making another for the following year.

On every side long cords attached to the carpet are held by imans. A few musicians are violently beating cymbals and tarabooks. After the carpet, follows a stout *santon*, perched on a camel, his body absolutely naked to the waist, swinging his body from right to left, and raising towards heaven an enormous head embellished with an immense white beard. This *santon* wears always the same costume. He walks thus in the streets of Cairo, and he puts on nothing more to go to Mecca. One may judge from that the colour of his skin. It is to him that is intrusted the care of the sacred camels that bear the carpet. This duty has been hereditary in his family since the conquest of Amru. It has been the same in the family of the camels; the honour of bearing the carpet is transmitted from sire to son. Therefore, since Egypt has been Mussulman, the family of the *santon* and that of the camels live beside each other.

The wave of people, broken here and there by carriages filled with English ladies and gentlemen, closes in behind the carpet. As it passes, the crowd prostrate themselves. From balconies, windows, and roofs, innumerable kerchiefs and scarves are waving. Then all passes away amid deafening clamour and the most dazzling coloured fireworks it is possible to conceive.

The entry of the carpet is the first act of a series of fêtes that follow during a fortnight, until the ceremony of the Dosseh, which is the closing scene.

The religious fêtes in Egypt coincide always with the popular fairs. Whilst the partisans of the former give themselves up to devotion, the most violent, those of the latter, plunge beside them into the most unbridled pleasures, sometimes the most obscene. It is thus that the grand fair of Tantah, an immense mascarade, which surpasses in follies all the antique orgies, is confounded with the fête of a *santon*. The special office of this *santon* is to put an end to the sterility of women. It appears this miracle is accomplished in fact—and not without reason!—on almost all the devotees that come to the fair of Tantah.

The anniversary of the birth of the Prophet presents the same mixture of popular saturnalian revels and religious manifestations, pushed on to the last degree of fanaticism. It was celebrated formerly in the Esbekieh Gardens, among the sycamores and near the poetic lake that have unfortunately disappeared. At present, it is upon the large, ill-defined space, situated between Cairo and Boolak, where they pitch for the ceremony a long circle of remarkable tents, some of which are admirable for colour and design. These tents open in front, and are very long; they suspend there girandoles of lanterns of diverse colours. In the middle of the circle they form, is placed a very high pole, furnished also with lanterns of various colours. There, is the theatre of the religious fête. But quite near, the Boolak road is filled with booths, where the popular



*almes*, the *carageux*, the mountebanks and Arabian orchestres give their representations. The sight of these booths is brilliant ; a multitude of little traders are selling red or white sugar-plums, and thousands of articles in sugar, red or white, that represent all the animals in creation. Little flags are suspended from the shops, which the illumination of the night renders charmingly gay. All this fair, in the open air, is remarkably picturesque. In the Arabian cafés, story-tellers are reciting interminable adventures, accompanying themselves with a sort of violin. Popular *almes* are dancing, or rather twisting themselves, with extraordinary agility. An odour of frying oil spreads everywhere. Every booth, lighted with candelabras filled with candles, is surrounded with a crowd of the curious, who are trying to penetrate there the mystery. Tarabooks, flutes, and tambourines fill the space with their noisy sounds. Great crowds in circles, fantastically lighted by *machallas*, surround the illustrious *carageux*, or rather Aly-Kaka ; for the Turkish *carageux*, who is a simple marionette or Chinese spirit, is replaced in Egypt by a man in flesh and bone, who bears the more expressive name of Aly-Kaka. The pen of Rabelais would be necessary to describe the scenes played by this personage, with the assistance of the spectators, among women and children, who laugh uproariously, and the gestures and witticisms of such grossness, that it is quite impossible to give the faintest idea of them. Aly-Kaka

is a sort of circus clown, whom they belabour with blows and overwhelm with sarcasm and jokes ; but then he takes his revenge in the exercise of his profession, in his own way. All that the imagination the most debased and polluted can conceive is nothing in comparison with the shameful spectacle, displayed in the rays of the sun, too, or by the light of the *machallas*, in presence of an amazed crowd.

But what a contrast between these scandalous representations and the pious exercises that are going on at a few yards' distance ! The tents, of which I have spoken, are filled with believers ; some, sitting near a candelabra, are swinging their heads lazily, crying "*Ah !*" badly articulated ; others, standing in two or three files, are executing a more violent movement all at once, first to the right, then to the left, uttering the same "*Ah !*" while two or three dervishes, with raised head and one hand on the cheek, are chanting a kind of psalm in a very shrill and melancholy tone. The view of these files of bodies swinging in cadence under a tent of vivid colours, is admirable. By degrees the agitation augments—it becomes frantic ; their heads knock against each other ; the "*Ah !*" sounds lugubriously ; their mouths, half open, are white with foam ; a devotee, suddenly inspired with the spirit of God, rushes into the middle of the group, and turns round and round with a senseless fury till he falls down. This kind of devotion is called *zikr*. In the other tents, from which escape

but a low murmuring, the faithful confine themselves to chanting verses of the Koran. Around the pole set up in the centre of the circle of tents, and from which rises a pyramid of multi-coloured lanterns, some dervishes are executing a slow and tragic round ; at each step they rise on their toes, brandishing an arm towards the top of the pole, uttering a hoarse cry ; then they turn gradually with more rapidity and, when they appear to be quite sanctified by this exercise, the fervent spectators draw around them in order to touch devoutly, at each turn of the round, the tips of their fingers. From this central point the ensemble of the tableau may be seen—the tents sparkling with clusters of lanterns that light them up, the groups thrown into convulsions by religious frenzy, and the processions arriving to join in the fête. Certain parts of the place are plunged into a demi-obscurity ; a few shadows are gliding about there noiselessly ; shapeless bundles lying on the ground represent simply people who, fatigued by the *zîkr*, have fallen asleep there, where they remain till morning, in spite of the noise and agitation, that in nowise trouble their slumber.

About eleven at night may be seen coming down from all quarters of the city particular fraternities ; they march, preceded by a flute and tarabook, and stop here and there to execute a little preparatory *zîkr* ; great lanterns covered with pink paper and flaming *machallas* lighten their way. When all the

fraternities are united they form in line, two deep, in which every man carries a candle, a torch, a lantern, *machalla*, or some light or other, and advance, chanting, towards the general spot of the *zîkr*; they pass through the fair, and with these thousands of lights flooding the shops with a brilliant glare, one might fancy it a tableau of "The Thousand and One Nights" appearing suddenly in a fairy illumination. The atmosphere is heated; sparks fly in every direction; therefore, one must not be astonished at many heads getting heated likewise, and elated saints springing suddenly out of the ranks and spinning round with impetuosity, administering to themselves and their neighbours resounding blows. Others calmer, are satisfied with disjointing their necks, as in the Punch and Judy shows. The long rings of this luminous and seething farandole wind off as slowly as possible, for each fraternity must arrive in its turn before the tent of the sheik, El-Bekry, the chief of the dervishes, and there give themselves up for twenty minutes to a furious *zîkr*; after which they extinguish their lights and disperse, leaving the place to others. The entire filing off lasts at least two hours.

After a fortnight of this religious preparation, the faithful are ready to a nicety for the Dosseh.\* Dosseh

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\* The description that follows has all the value of an historical account, for the ceremony of the Dosseh has now ceased to exist. The Khedive, Tewfik Pacha, who is a great enemy to superstition, and whose sentiments are conspicuous

means trampling. I do not know the real origin of this fête. There are two accounts of it. It is known that Mahomet, in the early part of his apostleship, was obliged to flee from Mecca, where he experienced the truthfulness of the evangelical maxim: "No man is a prophet in his own country." He had to pass, in his flight, a village inhabited by his partisans. At his approach, they prostrated themselves in his way. But the Prophet, whose moments were reckoned, could not stop, and urged on his horse over this human pavement. Oh, miracle! not one of the faithful was bruised; they all got up safe and sound. Is it in commemoration of this event that hundreds of men expose themselves every year to be crushed under the feet of a horse going at full gallop? Some say so, but others give to the Dosseh an origin purely Egyptian. According to their account, a Sultan Mameluke wished to compel a very pious and illustrious *santon*, called *Saad Eddin* (blessing of religion), who was encamped in the neighbourhood of Cairo, to come and live in his palace. The *santon* refused, the Mameluke insisted, and Saad Eddin at last yielded. "I will readily follow thee to Cairo," said he, "but I

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for kindness and humanity, would no longer permit a fanatic sheik to pass over a road paved with human bodies. The procession still takes place, but proceeds over an ordinary road, where there is no longer a single man even prostrated under the hoofs of the sheik's horse. Tewfik Pacha will not be blamed for having put an end to a custom so barbarous; one that made every year so many victims.

will work there a striking miracle, in order that the persecuting Mussulmans may listen to my voice and repent of their sins, that are an abomination in the sight of the only God." He then had set up on the roads, he was to pass, all the glass vessels found in the city ; then he mounted his horse and rode from his tent to the palace, on this fragile route, without breaking a single glass. This second tradition does not explain so well as the first the ceremony of the Dosseh. Granted, that a sheik, however holy he might be, had not broken the glass bottles under his horse's feet, it does not at all follow that he would have done as little harm to human ribs, if they had been submitted to the trial. I therefore prefer the first legend, though having, it is true, no historical reason to support this choice.

What is certain is, that the Dosseh is an extraordinary fête. The road that is to be paved with human bodies is marked with red flags ; it goes along the principal series of tents for the *zikr*. All Cairo rushes to join in the ceremony. One side of the road is absolutely filled with carriages of the harems, where may be perceived dresses of all colours. The horses caper, and the *sais* and the eunuchs have much trouble to hold them in. Behind this first line, a second line of carriages is filled with tourists clinging to the seats, sitting on each others' shoulders and hanging over the wheels, as is seen in the engravings representing the Derby. The tents are crammed

with spectators, the neighbouring houses are overflowing, a sea of floating turbans, unceasingly agitated, extends in every direction. Suddenly a general movement is produced. A mass of half-naked men, delirious from *zikr*, infatuated with fanaticism, cleave the compact crowd of spectators. Some are carrying banners, others are striking their chests with iron implements, or pricking their cheeks with sharp-pointed spikes. They all have haggard eyes and inflamed lips, and their indescribable howling is blended with the uproar of the tambourines, tarabooks, and flutes. It is an actual torrent that rushes on with unprecedented rapidity and violence. Police, armed with long staffs, with which they strike right and left, endeavour to check this human wave, that long undulates before stopping in its course. At last, by dint of pushing and driving back the multitude, a little order is established, and one perceives that the greater part of the faithful are lying on the ground, their heads turned towards Mecca and their shoulders tightly packed against each other.

I remarked, however, a little trickery. Among the comers many did not lie down, and they were generally those who cried the loudest. Often, to fill up an empty space, a policeman seizes a hesitating spectator and flings him without ceremony among the voluntarily prostrated. They pass and repass over these human bodies to place them close, stretch them out and dispose them properly. There is then a few

moments of strange anxiety. All noise has ceased, one hears merely the low murmuring of the prostrated faithful sending to Heaven their fervent prayers. This low humming, hardly perceptible, produces a profound impression; it is like a groaning afar off. At last the sheik advances, half bewildered, his face transfigured through ecstasy, over this living road. Two *sais* hold his horse, which is proudly prancing without seeming to suspect what he is treading under foot. Hardly has the sheik passed, when the crowd spring on the unhappy sufferers, and they are raised by a thousand arms with extraordinary rapidity. One has no time to inquire if they are wounded; they are at least in a light swoon; their head falls back, their arms drop inert on each side, and a smothered rattle gurgles in their throat. All those who touch them participate in the virtue of their act. They are therefore knocked about as much by the hands of the devotees as by the horse's hoofs. One is still more sanctified when he touches the sheik himself. He descends from his horse with difficulty; but I was struck with the rapid manner in which his ecstasy vanished away; hardly had he set his foot on the ground than he smiled amiably and went to take, with all the grace of a courtier, a cup of coffee in the tent of the viceroy.

On the evening of the Dosseh, they let off, in the place where the fête has taken place, and where the *sikr* is prolonged a fortnight, splendid fireworks that



last at least two hours. The reverberation of the explosions on the crowd is finer than the fireworks themselves. Roman candles fired on the banks of the canal of the Nile, light up the Arab villages with magnificent gleams. I have rarely seen more perfect fireworks of themselves; but I have certainly never seen any elsewhere so marvellously reflected and multiplied as were these by the admirable scenery amid which they were displayed. The *ziker* continues throughout the night of the Dosseh. The following morning catalepsy is general, and the most fervent are exhausted till the following year.

## CHAPTER XIV.

### THE ANNIVERSARY OF THE DEATH OF HUSSEIN.

THE religious ceremonies, that I have thus far related, had a character really national ; but I had the chance of being present also at the funeral fêtes, with which the Persians celebrate the anniversary of the death of Hussein, the second son of Ali and of Fatima. The Persians are not very numerous at Cairo ; they form there, however, a little colony, composed chiefly of shopkeepers and usurers, who preserve among the Egyptian people their manners, their worship, and their particular ceremonies. Islamism, as is known, is divided into two principal branches : that of the *Schiites*, Mussulmans, who recognize Ali only as the legitimate successor of Mahomet, and who call themselves the *Defenders of Justice* ; and that of the *Sunnites*, or partisans of the traditions, who, more solicitous about facts than doctrines, admit without dispute the authority of the first four caliphs. The Persians are *schiites*, and, like all the members of their sect, they profess for Ali and his two sons profound sentiments of respect and admira-

tion; they regard them as tender victims cruelly persecuted by abominable usurpers. Hussein, especially, is in their eyes a true martyr; the anniversary of the bloody catastrophe in which he perished, is become for them a day of mourning, during which they seek to redeem by fasting and prayer, the crime with which Islamism is stained in taking the life of the last of the nephews of the Prophet.

The elder of the two sons of Ali, Hassan, wanted, if I may be permitted to say, force of character. He was a saint, but one of those saints who shine especially through gentleness, renunciation of the things of this world, the forgetfulness of injuries—virtues, it is said, highly prized in the kingdom of heaven, but which this world, loving action, or at least the poetic protestation against fatality, esteems but very little. The following is a striking example of his extreme moderation. One day when he was at table, a slave let fall on him a dish containing boiling liquid. Confused by his awkwardness, the unlucky servant falls on his knees, pronouncing these words of the Koran, "Paradise is for those who suppress their anger." "I am not in anger," replies Hassan, dissimulating the pain, and even the appearance of any that he suffers. "Paradise is also for them who pardon," continues the slave, allured by the success of his first sentence. "I pardon thee also," says Hassan. "But those whom God loves above all others," adds the slave, more and more emboldened,

and desiring to finish the verse, "are those who return an offence by a benefit." "Well then," says Hassan, "receive then thy liberty and four hundred dirhems." An admirable speech, no doubt, but worthy of an ascetic, rather than of the chief of a great party! Hassan was a mystic; he had nothing of the man of action. Deprived of all his right, he retired to Mecca, where the exercise of a fervent piety made him forget the sacrifice he had made for the peace of Islamism, but did not arrest the anger of Yezid, son of Moawiah, who cowardly caused him to be poisoned. In commemoration of this sad end, the *shiites* refuse to drink on the day of the anniversary of Hassan's death; a privation relatively mild and consistent with the common misfortunes of a disenchanted saint.

It is by totally different exercises that they celebrate the anniversary of the death of Hussein, and justly. Hussein resembled his brother in nothing. He was of a nature impulsive, ardent, and courageous, capable of that brilliant and poetic heroism that strikes vigorously the imagination of men, whilst simple piety and humility are soon forgotten.

In the course of a mad adventure that he had undertaken, with as much valour as thoughtlessness, Hussein fell suddenly into an ambuscade with a few companions, devoted to his cruel fortune. They were hardly a handful of combatants, and a body of cavalry surrounded them on all sides. Hussein offered the

sacrifice of his rights to assure the life of his partisans: "Either let us take again our road to Arabia," said he to his enemies, "or give to my friends their liberty, and take me to Yezib; or conduct me to the frontier of our vast empire, that I may devote a life, henceforth useless, to fighting the enemies of Islamism." His request rejected, Hussein prepared himself to die bravely. The night before the combat he alone would guard the sleeping camp. Towards morning, however, being overcome with fatigue, he dozed, his head leaning on the guard of his sword, and he saw in a dream the Prophet, who said to him: "Have patience, Hussein! Soon shalt thou repose with us." A lugubrious prediction, which was to be inevitably realized. Hardly had day broken when four thousand cavaliers advanced against the little troop of the Alides, of which every man capable of bearing arms, rubbed with oil, perfumed like the ancient athletes, and armed with their finest weapons, appeared prepared rather for a fête than a desperate battle. It would be almost superfluous to relate the incidents of this unequal fight, which, for the partisans of Hussein, was but a long and brave martyrdom. All the faithful companions of the son of Alide succumbed one after the other, each immolating numerous victims before perishing. Hussein soon found himself almost alone: one of his sons, six of his brothers, and a great number of his nephews, formed for him a rampart with their dead bodies. But in

this supreme predicament, his enemies did not dare to strike him, the grandson of Mahomet having inspired them with so much respect. One of them, however, fearing less than the others to spill the blood of the Prophet, struck him on the head with his sword. Hussein, wounded, and seeing no longer any of his companions standing around him, gave up defending his life any longer. He retired to the entrance of his tent, took his youngest son in his arms, and awaited death. It was the child that was attacked by the first arrow. Then Hussein flung towards heaven this innocent blood, exclaiming: "Oh, my God! if Thou hast refused us Thine aid, grant it, at least, to them who have not yet offended Thee, and punish the wicked." The sun was advancing towards the west, and the combat had lasted since daybreak. Overcome by the burthen of the day, by thirst, heat, and suffering, Hussein rose to get a little water from the banks of the Euphrates. He was killed on the bank of the river, and his head was carried to Coufa, whilst his body, trampled under the horses' feet, remained unburied.

This end, almost sublime, of Hussein, revives every year, among the *Schiites*, expiatory fêtes, which have, it seems, in Persia, a very great solemnity. They are more simple in Egypt, but we shall see that there also they are not wanting in originality. The anniversary of the martyrdom of Hussein is the tenth of the month of Moharrem. This year the tenth of the

month of Moharrem corresponded with the third of January. I had lately arrived at Cairo, and it was quite by accident that I saw the ceremonies of the *Schiites*, which take place generally with closed doors, and are ordinarily little noticed by a population belonging almost entirely to the sect of the *Sunnites*. I was conducted by a petty trader of the Khan-Khalil, of Persian origin, who led me among his fellow-countrymen with a zeal and good will with which I was much moved. I have already mentioned that a mosque of Cairo is reputed to possess the head of Hussein, which has been brought there, I know not how, nor when, nor by whom, nor why. This mosque, being situated quite close to the Khan-Khalil, I went there to take my place under a great portico that gives access to the bazaar, opposite the mosque. My guide found means to place chairs there by violently driving away some little girls, who occupied the place before us. At first they suffered themselves to be defeated without a word, then they went away crying, but without the least protestation. Our chairs were placed on a sort of raised platform. Beside us extended a narrow street, a real Egyptian narrow lane, with great cloths stretched from one side to the other to intercept the sunshine, carpets hanging here and there from the windows, elegant *moucharabihs*, and wonderful screens to shop windows. An immense concourse of people, there squeezed in together, were hustling and elbowing each other.

I trod under foot scores of turbans and tarbouches. Petty hucksters were pushing their way through the mob. Now and then five or six gendarmes, armed with whips and courbaches, rushed on the crowd, under the pretext of re-establishing order, and struck fiercely in every direction. Then it was an indescribable scamper, a mêlée of routed turbans, which could be compared only with the picture of the Battle of Aboukir of the Museum of Versailles. At one moment a carriage, conducting three English ladies of rare intrepidity, was involved in the brawl, but after twenty or thirty paces, it was obliged to beat a retreat, and though I have witnessed since many other prodigies of dexterity on the part of the Cairo drivers, it was one more subject of wonder for me that the coachman managed to turn in the middle of this surge of human heads without touching anybody. The English ladies did not understand, I hope, Arabic; for, otherwise, their chaste ears would have been offended at too obtrusive remarks. It was not that the mob shouted; on the contrary, I do not know what exciting expectation existed that seemed to suspend over them so unusual a silence. Excepting the low and scandalous murmur provoked by the presence of the three English ladies, I was surprised at the little noise altogether made by this compact mass of the faithful and the curious. They were seen but not heard. When the gendarmes struck them with all their might they fled in disorder, but without utter-



ing the faintest exclamation. It was about ten o'clock at night. This scene altogether, lighted up by five or six lanterns of petroleum lamps, and the lights that fell from the windows, was somewhat strange, mysterious, and fantastic.

But it was still merely the prologue of the drama. All at once the doors of the mosque open, and then are seen coming out of it, at first, about ten men bearing flaming *machallas*. Behind these torches are advancing green and red banners, that form a kind of canopy over a white horse, mounted by a young boy of ten or twelve, clad in a surplice, also white. The unhappy child brandished over his head, carefully shaved, whilst chanting with full voice a sort of warlike psalm, a long poignard, extremely tapering, and at every step of the horse he inflicted on his forehead a deep cut, from which flowed a stream of blood. I have never seen a countenance more warlike than that of this infant fanatic. His poignard glittered like lightning in the beams from the *machallas*: it was seen rising and falling in cadence with a regularity that proved the surprising firmness of the hand that held it.

After this child on horseback, about forty men, clad likewise in white surplices, dancing a mad caper, were brandishing overhead sabres, poignards, and scimitars, then bringing them down heavily on their foreheads. The blows were distinctly heard, so violent were they! All these men were bleeding. There

were some who seemed demented, whose clothes were absolutely red, and who staggered in an indescribable frenzy. A wild, senseless, brutal devotion glared in the eyes of those whose faces still presented a human appearance, and were not quite changed into a horrible wound. They chanted in chorus the same psalm. They were pushed on by the crowd, rather than directed by their own will. With these men were associated a few children. The most fanatic excited pity. I remarked with pleasure two or three of them, who brandished their sabre very high, but allowed it to fall rather gently on their skulls. It was, however, the exception. This sanguinary dance finished, another horse arrived, bearing a second child ; this one so little, that it was necessary to support him on his seat to prevent him from falling. I confess that a shudder passed through all my body, and that I felt somewhat faint. Happily, in trying to look on, I saw that this second child had few scratches on his head, but a little straw in his hair. He contemplated the crowd with an artless and troubled look. Representing Hassan, the first son of Ali, who, as I have mentioned, died of thirst, he had not to bear any external scar of the martyr, whilst the young boy who preceded the cortège represented Hussein, who, having been beheaded, required, it seems, sanguinary anniversaries. The second child was followed by a fresh gang, composed of real, furious madmen, who leaped about in every

direction, striking their left side with frightful energy. One of them, quite naked and quite black, placed in the middle of the dance, did not indulge himself in administering to his own body the most sounding blows; these with closed fists were reserved for his colleagues with exemplary liberality. He occasionally snatched a staff from a member of the cortège to strike more vigorously on his chest or his neighbour's. He did not rest a moment; jumping unceasingly to the right, to the left, before and behind, he moved his legs as much as his arms, and he chanted with a voice so vibratory, that it smothered every other noise. Sometimes the procession stopped; it was then an exchange of slaps, blows with the fist, and strokes of the sabre, mingled with wild chanting, that made all the street shake. Finally, a third and last horse bore simply a turban and arms. This turban represented the head, and the arms represented the lance and sword of Hussein, who, probably, little suspected, when he fell, after a day of heroic struggle, under the sword of his enemies, that his own blood would cause so much still to flow, twelve hundred years later, everywhere where the sect of the *Schiites* would be spread.

When the procession had entirely passed, my guide conducted me through the narrowest passages of the Khan-Khalil to the place where the ceremony was to end. But on the way we fell in again with the band of smiters. I have never passed through

such a gang. It is fortunate that the crowd is so yielding at Cairo. I had a narrow escape, however, from receiving a firebrand on my head, and overthrowing two holy personages, naked down to the waist, who were devoutly exchanging thwacks capable of staving-in the most resistant ribs. The cortège passed down the Mousky, where the windows were filled with countless spectators. At last we came to an end with the procession.

It was in a sort of interior court, such as there is in almost all Arab houses ; it is covered with great white sheets, hung with black cloth, and ornamented with lustres and lanterns. Against a side-wall rose a throne, surmounted by a niche, in which had been arranged the strangest decoration imaginable. Fancy a mantelpiece, such as is seen in middle-class people's houses in the country, in France ; a few candles, some artificial flowers under a glass globe, and in the centre a gilt time-piece, in the most extravagant taste. Without this extraordinary niche, the general appearance of the hall would not have been wanting in a certain simplicity. It was filled with Persians, in long robes and great turbans, or in rich furred cloaks, tricked out with chestnut-coloured tubular hats, resembling the head-dress of the dancing dervish. The countenances of these Persians expressed profound grief, and a few among them shed tears over the misfortunes of that poor Hussein, so wickedly put to death by his enemies.

At the approach of the procession, there was a general movement of attention and pious meditation. The bleeding sabre-bearers entered the first; the child, who had marched at their head, had disappeared; his horse alone entered into the court. I suppose the cavalier had dismounted to mix among the other faithful; perhaps he had fallen off, fainting; but this was hardly probable. Whatever had become of him, his companions were there, and commenced turning, continuing their sanguinary exercises. A few gendarmes, placed in the middle of the circle, arrested with a long staff the blows that might accidentally have been too serious, or have fallen on the bystanders. This precaution was not useless, especially in the street; for the Egyptians who are *Sunnites* make no ceremony in turning into derision the devotion of the *Schiites*, and without the intervention of the police, people little respected, would certainly have had an eye knocked out or a limb broken. This unbridled sarabande was followed up about half an hour with the same song, which resembled a little a children's roundel, though it was a religious ballad.

Charitable individuals were sponging as well as possible the sabre-bearers, and handkerchiefs absolutely red, that oozed like wet linen, incessantly passed from hand to hand. The surplices had become scarlet. It was a scene of hideous butchery. At last, at the signal of a sheik, everything stopped, and each went into a neighbouring room to wash his face and

bandage his head. Nothing was more singular than the rapidity with which these men, half-scalped, coolly reassumed their self-possession. Barely wiped dry, they came to talk with the spectators with the air of people very much at their ease, whose heads were the soundest in the world. After the sabre-bearers came the smiters. During three-quarters of an hour there was a noise of hands falling in cadence on naked chests, which made more row than all the washerwomen of Brittany united. Sometimes the round turned with rapidity, sometimes it stopped, and each of the faithful leaping up, cried out with all his might, "Hussein! Hassan! Hassan! Hussein!" All the spectators imitated the movement, but with a very gentle hand, and in striking on their clothes, and not on a chest naked and bleeding. A few mad-brained, among the sabre-bearers, with their wounds hardly stanchèd, came to join in the round of the strikers. None exhibited more ardour than they. When the zeal of arms and throats appeared extinguished, a man less exhausted than the others gave himself a sounding blow, vociferating in the shrillest tone, "Hussein!" Then everything began again. Finally, this saturnalia came to an end, thanks to the universal exhaustion, and everyone went to adjust his toilet. During this sort of interlude, petty dealers passed coffee, fruit, lemonade, narghillies, and conversation became general. Nobody laughed, however; had anyone been so imprudent as to have done so, he

certainly would have been cut down. He must have been endowed, besides, with very little nervous sensibility to have been disposed to laugh. As for me, I trembled with emotion. But the assembly was evidently absorbed in the remembrance of the murder of Ali; it was not touched by a single detail of all that had just passed before it; the persons composing it felt their hearts moved by a tragedy incomparably more, cruel, and all the sanguinary heads that had defiled before them, had not hindered them a moment from thinking of that heroic head of the most brilliant of the Alides, rolling in the waves of the Euphrates under the perfidious sabres of the lieutenants of Yezid.

I have been present at many religious ceremonies in Egypt; the only one that has left on me an impression of savage devotion, of mysticism pushed on to delirium and real fanaticism, is the anniversary of the death of Hussein. Yet I did not follow it to the end. After the violent scenes I had witnessed, a milder scene was to take place, but not less moving. A reader was to get up into a black throne and read there until daybreak, the history of the unfortunate Ali and his two sons. It was the Passion sermon of the Persians. Every year they listen to the long details with a grief that certain Catholics experience at the same recital of the episodes of the crucifixion, and never is there found among them a sensible man ready to assuage their affliction by a word or two, as

prudent as those of that good curé, who said to a congregation too violently affected by the tragedy of Calvary, "My brethren, do not weep so much; it is a very long time since it happened, and then, perhaps, it is not true!" For the *Schiites*, time has not effaced the impression of the murder, undoubtedly authentic, of Hussein. Before even the reader had begun the exposition, I noticed around me sober personages smoking quietly, who appeared perfectly indifferent. On looking at them more attentively, their eyes were swimming in tears, through anticipation of the despair which everyone was soon to experience. I did not feel at all disposed to associate myself with such sentiments! I had a pressing need of air, freedom, and repose. I therefore did not see the Persians weep in choir, whole hours, over the sad end of the Alides; but for many nights afterwards, there appeared to me in the intervals of sleeplessness, the dazzling light of sabres flashing over gory heads in the midst of a frightful tumult, and flaming torches throwing a lugubrious light over this horrible picture.



## CHAPTER XV.

### NATURE IN EGYPT—THE NILE.

HARDLY had Amru-Ben-el-Ass made the conquest of Egypt, when the Caliph Omar wished to know the new province, which his lieutenant had just taken possession of in the name of Allah. He then wrote to him this letter: "Amru-Ben-el-Ass, what I want of thee on the reception of the present letter, is, that thou give me a picture of Egypt, exact enough, that I may fancy I see with my own eyes that fine country. To thee, greeting!" Omar was exacting. What writer would be capable of describing Egypt in a manner that one might fancy he saw it with his own eyes on reading his description? Already a distinguished general and legislator of the first order, was Amru going to be a painter of genius? Omar did not seem to doubt it, and he was right. The reply that Amru sent him is, in fact, a finished picture of wonderful simplicity and truthfulness, and which, perhaps, has been equalled only by that, which, after an interval of many centuries, a greater general than Amru—Bonaparte—was to sketch in his turn, of a

country, the character of which its conquerors alone seem to have well seen and well understood. I cannot resist the desire to give, from beginning to end, the letter of Amru :

“O Prince of the Faithful! Picture to thyself an arid desert, and a magnificent country, between two mountains, one having the shape of a sandhill, and the other that of the belly of a lean horse, or rather of the back of a camel. Such is Egypt. All its products, and all its riches from Isoar to Mancha, from Hassouan as far as the frontier of Ghaza, come from a blessed river that runs with majesty in the middle of it. The moment of the flood and of the fall of its waters, is as regulated as the course of the sun and the moon. There is a fixed time when all the sources of the universe come to pay to this king of rivers the tribute, to which Providence has subjected them to do: then the waters augment; they come out of their bed and cover the surface of Egypt to deposit there a productive mud. There is no longer any communication from one village to another, than by means of light barks as plentiful as leaves of the palm. Afterwards, when the moment arrives in which the waters cease to be necessary to the fertilization of the soil, this docile river enters again into the limits that destiny has prescribed to it, to permit the gathering of the treasures that it has hidden in the bosom of the earth. A people protected by Heaven, and who like the bee, appear destined to work only for others,

without profiting themselves from the fruit of their labour and toil, open lightly the bosom of the earth and there deposit seeds, the prosperity of which they wait for from the benevolence of that Supreme Being, who makes the harvests grow and ripen : the germ developes ; the stem rises ; its ear forms by the help of a beneficent dew, that takes the place of rains and keeps up the nourishing juice with which the soil is watered. To the most abundant harvest, suddenly succeeds sterility. It is thus that Egypt offers successively, O Prince of the Faithful ! the image of a desert arid and sandy, of a plain liquid and silvery, of a marsh covered with black and thick mud, of a plain green and undulating, of a garden planted with the most varied flowers, and of a vast field covered with golden harvests. Blessed be for ever the name of the Creator of so many wonders ! Three regulations would contribute marvellously to the prosperity of Egypt, and to the welfare of its children : the first is to adopt no project tending to increase the tax ; the second, to employ a third of the revenues in the augmentation and maintenance of the canals, the dams, and bridges ; and the third, not to raise taxes, but in kind, on the fruits the earth produces. To thee, greeting ! ”

An admirable and complete description, from which there is nothing to take away and little to add. Egypt has not changed since Amru, and he had found it such as Herodotus had described it several centuries

before him. "Egypt is a present from the Nile," said the old historian. "Where the waters stop, the land stops," says an Arab proverb. Egypt is but an immense long oasis situated in the middle of the desert. As soon as the Delta is passed, one is struck with the narrowness of the valley of the Nile: this magnificent country, squeezed according to the expression of Amru, "between two mountains, one having the shape of a sand-hill, and the other that of the belly of a lean horse, or rather of the back of a camel," is of an astonishing narrowness. In its widest parts, it has at most six leagues of extent; nowhere are lost completely to sight the great fading lines of the desert. One might say it was a ribbon of verdure unfolded over the sand. But the verdure of Egypt is of a vigour of colour of which it is difficult to form an idea, and the desert produces from afar the effect of a sea of quicksilver: the undulations of its sand-hills burnt by a fiery sun, and which reflect its rays with extreme intensity, resemble waves of such dazzling whiteness that one can hardly bear its brilliancy.

If agricultural Egypt is a present from the Nile, Egypt entire is a present from the sun. This long green plain without any unevenness, where vast fields of bersim, a kind of trefoil of considerable height, extend beyond reach of the eye, traversed through and through by the Nile, intersected in every direction by canals, interspersed here and there with villages of greyish earth and palm groves covered with dust,

would be very unattractive under the dull sky of our western climates. All the colours there would appear dimmed ; the sand of the desert there would be blackish ; the verdure itself would assume there sombre and dirty tints. One would not have the resource of undulating ground, fresh and charming valleys, limpid brooks, bedewed greensward, groups of trees, and mysterious nooks and corners that make the charm of our European fields and woodlands. You may walk for whole hours in Egypt without finding any other shade than that of a slope, or that projected afar by the top of a palm. Everything there is dry and open. But thanks to the marvellous light of the East, this country of a plane does not seem a flat country ; the diversity of colours supplies the place of the diversity of contours ; it sets off certain objects and plunges others into an unobtrusive penumbra ; it models them all in the most powerful way ; its play infinitely multiplied, produces the most varied and striking effects. To sum up in a word, light is everything in Egypt : suppress that, you would have the most monotonous country in the world ; restore it, you have a country of finished beauty. Egypt is a reflector in which a limpid sky regards itself with an incomparable smile.

Nothing, in fact, offends the eye in the Egyptian country, although all the hues there are violent, I was going to say, astonishingly ferocious. Nature recoils from no boldness ; she places there side by

side the most incongruous colours without weakening in the slightest their value; she does not degrade them in order to combine them: these artificial processes of the human art to her are useless. To produce harmony, it is sufficient for her to bathe the ensemble of her work in a kind of opal vapour of a transparent and almost imperceptible tint, that softens all the parts, and hinders them from clashing. She never has recourse to the processes of those painters who compose a colour of innumerable diverse shades, more or less mixed and melted. She acts with an entire freedom, quite sure of accomplishing, by the most simple means, the effect she intends to produce. It is in a sole scale that she composes her finest symphonies. The dark backgrounds of the European country do not exist in Egypt; obscurity there never serves to set off light; the thickest shades there are of a blue or delicate violet; the rose there serves as a transition between the scarlet red of the sky and the deep green of the valley of the Nile; golden half tones unite the green with the ardent yellow of the desert, and all these colours of a perfect clearness and unity, harmonise together without effort, without concussion, without dazzling, with marvellous grace and splendour.

The beauty of lines is united with the purity and brilliancy of colours to enhance the perfection of Egyptian landscapes. Closed between two deserts, that undulate gently around it, the valley of the Nile

seems to have been drawn by the hand of an artist accustomed to the grandest effects. As to the Nile itself, nothing gives to so high a degree the sensation of power in calmness, of sovereign force, tranquil, and sure of itself. The river runs majestically between two low shores, which every year it overflows. But even at the moment of inundation, it does not necessarily burst forth and overthrow everything in its way ; it rises gradually, in a progression so regular, that its rising is not noticed ; only from hour to hour it spreads more in space, and all the fields near it are covered little by little under its heavy flood. It is known that at the moment of the flood its waters become red ; their ordinary colour is yellowish ; but at some distance they appear absolutely blue, of so vivid an azure is the sky itself which they reflect. The slopes, composed of black mud, that border it on each side, are covered with villages and palm groves, amid which it seems to enrol itself, rather than run. No river, perhaps, is so simply imposing. There is in it, as it were, a latent consciousness of the revolutions that have been produced on its banks. Has it not seen the dawn of civilization ? Has it not witnessed the development and the fall of innumerable empires ? Has it not contemplated the eternal spectacle of human grandeur, by turns elevated and shattered by the caprices of chance and fortune ? Among these incessant agitations, the regularity of its course, "as regulated as those of the sun and the

moon " has not varied ; its beneficent action has survived all the glories, all the catastrophes ; immense cities, capitals of the greatest kingdoms, have crumbled away on its banks ; it has covered them with its prolific mud without troubling itself about what it buried of thoughts, memorials, and vanished ambitions. The palaces, the obelisks, the most gigantic monuments have no ways stopped its course ; everything has changed, everything has been modified around it ; it alone has remained unchangeable, it alone to-day, as on the day when it hollowed out for the first time a bed towards the sea, ceases not a single year, to accomplish at a fixed hour the same fertilizing work.

Marvellous permanence of the forces of nature ! Imperishable in a country where repose so many ruins, one would say that the Nile has the superb impassibility of things that feel themselves eternal amid the infinite transformation of societies and the incessant mirage of human illusions.

It is in the evening, especially at sunset, that it should be contemplated, if one would seize the particular character of its grandeur in calmness and might. I had greatly admired at the general exhibition, among the works of Fromentin, a little picture, a little larger than the hand, and which seemed, however, immense on account of the beauty of the lines, and the imposing charm of the general aspect. It represented the passage of a ferry on the Nile. It



was precisely at sunset, or rather a little after, at the moment when the brilliant tints of the day give place to a bluish penumbra, traversed, however, by a few rays of a golden yellow. An Arab in rags, mounted on a camel, waited patiently the arrival of the ferry, which loomed forth in the haze of the evening like a fantastic boat. Another Arab still more tattered, squatting in the fashion of the Egyptians of the antique monuments, the legs united and the knees raised to the height of the chin, the hands resting on the knees, was waiting also beside the camel. The expression of resigned patience of these three beings, the two men and the camel, was striking. Nature altogether seemed as much in repose as they. The sky was darkening with colours more and more sombre; the horizon, where were standing out a few palms, was of a violet half effaced; the ferry boat traced on the water a wake still yellowish, although almost imperceptible. But what was of incomparable truthfulness, was the Nile itself. One distinguished very well one of its banks, that of the foreground, where were placed two Arabs and their camel; a few rushes growing there thinly scattered; but it was impossible to know where the other bank began, so low was it, and so much confounded was its colour in the demi-light of the crepuscule with that of the waters. There were not in this picture any inequalities of the land; nothing but the lines of the river and the horizon. Never has

Egypt been better conceived, nor more faithfully rendered. How many times in presence of scenes of the same kind, has it not seemed to me to have under my eyes the picture of Fromentin.

The ferries are numerous on the Nile, where there are hardly ever bridges ; therefore the fellahs who return in the evening from work, desiring to cross, are obliged to wait for the ferryman to come and take them. Worn out by the fatigues of the day, they contemplate the river with an expression of profound melancholy, almost stupified. Nature covers herself under a bluish grey veil, that falls in some way from the sky as soon as the sun has disappeared. It is then that the lines of the landscape appear in all their perfection. In the day, the vividness of the light, the brilliant reflections of the colours, partially hide them ; but when one sees them extending afar in the evening, with contours of extreme firmness under subdued colours, it is impossible not to experience an impression of ineffable grandeur, that fills the soul with vague, musing melancholy, like everything that strikes it forcibly with surprise and admiration.

At night, by the splendour of the stars, or by the glowing light of the moon, the Nile is also very fine. Faint lights twinkle on the light Nile boats of the fishermen, whose long yards have a form so original and graceful. At the time of the inundation, a service of watchers, organized by Ismaïl Pacha, adds

another picturesque effect to those that nature offers herself in such number. Here and there a guardian, stationed against a heap of stones, a lighted torch before him, examines the flood. This long cordon of watchers extends from Cairo to the first cataract. It is a luminous and noisy chain ; for the watchers, to keep themselves awake, exercise the same system as the warehouse-watchers at Alexandria : they pass a watchword that circulates incessantly from mouth to mouth, and thus traverses in a few hours, the whole extent of Egypt ; then it returns to start again. When the slightest breach is made in a dam, the nearest watchman hastens to repair it with the stones placed before him ; for a hole almost imperceptible through which the water rushes, suffices to lead rapidly to the destruction of the entire dam. If he does not succeed in it himself, he shouts out a cry of alarm, and all the neighbouring watchers come to his aid. Sometimes, in spite of these combined efforts, a dam is carried away. It is necessary to repair it as quickly as possible, to prevent immense disasters. The sheiks run into the villages, and with the courbache in hand, collect rigorously all the men they meet and compel them to come and work for the public good. One often sees at Cairo thus pass great gangs of forced labourers, composed of hundreds, penned between two ropes, and conducted by inflexible chiefs. However little one of them may try to get away, he is soon caught and well thrashed.

It is necessary to have at hand an immense number of men to stop the overflowing of the river. When the danger becomes too great, they do not hesitate to make human masses enter into the bed, and stand as compact as possible, who oppose to the increasing flood, the dam of their naked chests, whilst the labourers raise a little further off, the dam of mud and stones, to replace that carried away by the inundation. And yet, when the flood is considerable, as last year, for example, whole villages are nevertheless carried away by it ; unfortunate families remain swallowed up by the waters with their houses, their cattle, and their crops. The Nile is an inexorable power that pitilessly breaks down everything that comes in its way : it has the impassibility of a blind destiny, whose imperious course nothing can turn aside.

We must not therefore be astonished at the kind of worship the Egyptians have always rendered to their river. In the year that followed the Arabian conquest, the waters at first did not rise to the regular level. The people were in consternation. The Copts went to find Amru and said to him : " Prince, there is for our Nile a law established by custom ; one must abide by it, in order that its waters arrive at the degree necessary to the irrigation of the land and their fertilization." " What is this established law ? " asked Amru. They replied : " The thirteenth day of the Coptic month, Baounéh (the 7th of June) we search

for a young and beautiful virgin, we carry her away by force from her parents, we dress her richly in the fine costume of a bride, and we throw her into the Nile at the place consecrated to this ceremony." "This sacrifice," replied Amru, "can no longer take place under Islamism." But as the Nile, that comprehended nothing of the religious and philanthropic scruples of Amru, persisted in not rising, they referred the matter to the Caliph Omar. This one, showing himself as prudent as when he acted to construct the great mosque of Fostatt, contrived to address the Nile in an epistolary form in this admonition: "In the name of the clement and merciful God, from Omar, son of Khattab, to the blessed Nile of Egypt! If thy course till now has depended only on thy own will, suspend it; but if it has depended upon the commands of God Almighty, we shall beseech this God to give it its complete flood!" Amru piously threw into the Nile the epistle of Omar; and the river hastening to obey the Caliph's commands, rose immediately to the height of sixteen cubits. Struck by this miracle, the Copts renounced their ancient worship for the God-Nile, or rather they renounced giving to this worship the character of a sanguinary sacrifice. The young and beautiful virgin was replaced by a puppet coarsely modelled in the form of a statue. At the present time still, when they open solemnly the dam of the canal, this allegorical statue, covered with a bride's veil, is thrown, amid general acclamations, into

the waters of the river. The human sacrifice is suppressed, but the fête subsists with all the character of a religious rite.

The adoration of the Nile is, in fact, the only worship that is perpetuated in Egypt, through all the religious revolutions of this country. At the present time, as at that of the conquest of Amru, the great inundation, and the opening of the dyke of the canal, give place to the most brilliant public rejoicings and demonstrations. The flood is covered night and day by numerous boats, containing musicians and singers of both sexes, and the inhabitants of Cairo rush in crowds to these diversions. Many times the Caliphs, frightened at the licence of pleasure parties, that became parties of debauchery, have interdicted, but in vain, this aquatic saturnalia. General Bonaparte, less severe, mixed in them without hesitation. The decisive moment, the culminating point of the fête, is that when the dam is destroyed, and the waves of the Nile rush with a prodigious violence into the bed of the canal. Women plunge their infants into the water, hundreds of Arabs throw themselves in, all at once, to experience its beneficent action, for it then accomplishes miracles of cure : others are urged by a very different attraction and dive head foremost into the torrent ; the spectators amuse themselves by throwing pieces of money into the flood, and there are never wanting numerous competitors trying to get them at the risk of their lives.

All the soil of Egypt is impregnated with Nile water : everywhere where one digs, a spring immediately rises. When one desires to construct any edifice whatever, it is necessary to calculate a certain sinking produced by the humidity of the earth. Formerly, the water of the Nile was esteemed delicious ; it was carried to the most distant countries, and particularly to the princesses of the blood of the Ptolemies, married into foreign families : the Sultan at Constantinople would have no other. This reputation was, it must be admitted, rather exaggerated. The Nile water is pure only at the moment when the inundation decreases ; for when the river is rising, and when it is too low, the water is surcharged with a mass of matter, more or less injurious, that greatly changes its quality. Its principal merit, when it is pure, is its extreme lightness. One may drink very large quantities of it without fatigue—a boon very precious during the great heat. But as I would be perfectly impartial after having expressed all my admiration and esteem for the Nile, I will quote the very different judgment expressed by Volney in his *Voyage en Egypte et en Nubie*. “We must pardon,” said he, with the irony of a philosopher not misled from reality by poetic enthusiasm, “we must pardon a European, if, when he hears the Egyptians extolling the beauty of the waters of the Nile, he smiles at their ignorance. Never will these troubled and muddy waters have for him the charm of clear fountains and

limpid brooks ; never, unless from a sentiment exalted by privation, will the swarthy body of an Egyptian woman, dripping with yellowish water, remind him of the Naiads rising from the bath. Six months of the year the water of this river is so muddy that it is necessary to let it settle before drinking it ; during the three months that precede the inundation, reduced to a little depth, it becomes heated in its bed, greenish, fœtid, and full of worms, and one is obliged to have recourse to that which has been received and preserved in the reservoirs. In all seasons, delicate people take care to perfume it. Besides, in no other country is so much water used. In the houses, in the streets, everywhere, the first object that presents itself, is a vessel of water, and the first movement of an Egyptian is to seize it and drink a large draught of it, which in no way inconveniences him, on account of extreme perspiration. These vessels, which are of earthenware unglazed, let the water filter through to the extent of becoming empty in a few hours. The object they have in view, by this simple arrangement, is to keep the water very cool, and they attain it all the more by exposing it to a brisk current of air. In some parts of Syria they drink the water that has transuded ; but in Egypt they drink what remains in the vessel."

These last particulars are still strictly correct. As to Volney's contempt for the ignorance of the Egyptians, it is a sentiment that risks much to be



no longer shared by anybody. It is true that the swarthy Egyptian women, dripping with yellowish water, do not much resemble the Naiads. One may often see them along the Nile and the canals, occupied in washing the sole chemise that generally serves them to hide charms so little mythological; then, when this washing is finished, take the chemise in their extended hands and hold it thus spread out in the air to dry. They have indeed then the costume of the Naiads leaving the bath; but we must believe Volney when he affirms that they have no other attribute of the seductive divinities, which he was wrong in expecting to find in Egypt. It is true also, that there are not to be found in this strange country clear fountains nor limpid brooks. One sees there but an immense river and thousands of canals hollowed out by the hand of man. And yet the Egyptians are right in extolling the beauty of this river. The eighteenth century admired only what was pretty, understood only what was graceful, and had not the sentiment of grandeur. But, *nous avons bien changé tout cela*, and most travellers are certainly more disposed to share the enthusiasm of the natives for the *God-Nile* than manifest for this national worship, the light irony and simple compassion of former times.

## CHAPTER XVI.

### SYOUT.

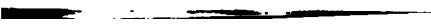
IT is a shame to have passed a whole winter in Cairo without having gone into Upper Egypt. Most travelers even, come only to Cairo to embark on the Nile and gain at least the first cataract. Few excursions, it appears, are finer; few travels offer a greater variety of views of nature and historical souvenirs. But to go into Upper Egypt, you must choose between two plans, which have each its disadvantages. The simplest is, to embark on one of the great steamboats that leave Cairo every week, and which make in twenty-one days the journey to the first cataract, going and returning. I confess that it did not for a moment tempt me. To be piled up on a boat with a hundred Englishmen and Englishwomen; to get out all together at the same stations; to admire during a fixed number of minutes the same monuments; to feel yourself always squeezed and hurried on by the crowd; never to have the freedom of your movements and your impressions: what could be more distasteful in a country that seems to be made for solitary contem-

plation, for prolonged and tranquil meditation? The second plan is charming in itself: it consists in hiring a dahabieh, a kind of bark of elegant form painted in the most vivid colours, furnished with one of those great sails that gives to the cange of the fisherman the aspect of a sea-bird sailing on the water. One makes a bargain with a dragoman, who undertakes to nourish you, to conduct you, to furnish you with asses everywhere where you wish to stop, to show you thoroughly, and according to your desire, all the curiosities of the route. About ten Arab boatmen, copper coloured, chanting always their melancholic refrains, form the crew of the dahabieh. This manner of going up the Nile is delightful; it is the only one that can suit an imagination ever so little poetic; but as one goes by sailing, towing, or rowing, the trip is long; it lasts a month and a half, sometimes two months. Now, one may pass very happily two months on the Nile, but on the double condition of not being alone, and of having travelling companions with whom you are in perfect harmony, in humour, ideas, and sentiments. Nothing is more dangerous than to embark with persons of whom you are not absolutely sure. In this immense solitude of Egypt, the monotonous life of the dahabieh immediately sets together by the ears the characters opposed. How many imprudent people have I not seen, leave intimate friends in appearance, who have returned almost mortal enemies. I did not dare expose myself to an

adventure of this sort, and not finding the means of securing entirely the two conditions of an agreeable tour in Upper Egypt, I confined myself to going as far as Syout.

Still I did not follow the Nile in order to go to Syout ; I took simply the railway. The journey lasts twelve hours across a country singularly spoilt by the manufactories of Ismail Pacha and his sugar-cane plantations. On leaving Cairo about eight in the morning, you enjoy the spectacle, always marvellous, of the first hours of the day in Egypt. On the right, the Lybian desert, guarded by the great Pyramids, extends beyond eye-reach its gilded undulations ; in the centre, the green valley of the Nile awakes full of freshness and grace ; further, in the centre still, the Nile, dyed blue by the reflexion of the sky, unrolls far away its majestic curves gay with vivid colours. But what is particularly admirable, what partakes of the dream and fairyland, it is the second line of the desert on the left, on the side of the rising sun. Every one of the softest shades of rose, blue, and violet shines over a range of hills united by slight depressions of ground ; the colours pale away little by little on the slopes of these hills which lower gradually as far as the Nile, wrapping it there in great white sheets. Unfortunately, when the last Pyramids of Sakkarah are passed, and you arrive in Central Egypt, the picture changes completely. The valley of the Nile enlarges so much, that the desert

on each side appears no longer like a light border on a blue sky. The plain is covered with fields of sugarcane that resemble most deceptively fields of maize. Sometimes the crop is gathered, and then nothing more is distinguished than a blackish earth which the fellahs are turning over and over again. Immense factories, soiled with dust, rise here and there. These factories, the machinery of which comes from the workshops of the firm of Cail, are, it seems, most complete as sugar factories. But they, nevertheless, spoil the landscape in a manner most disagreeably. Nothing is more ugly than their thick columns of smoke rising in the transparent atmosphere of Egypt. The light cannot play on these opaque masses, that produce the effect of great blots on a brilliant picture. But then, if this part of Egypt is the least beautiful of all, it is in return the richest ; it is there where are the daïras of Ismail Pacha ; therefore everything there is wonderfully organized for the cultivation : canals run in every direction ; the railway crosses flood gates of architectural pretension, but of a frightful Gothic style, whose construction has cost millions of francs, without mentioning the forced labour. A little agricultural railway serves to convey the sugarcane. To see the smoke and dust rising everywhere in the sky, one would fancy, he was no longer in Egypt, but in Flanders. At last the daïras come to an end ; at Thenéh, Minieh, Manfalout, etc., one sees Egypt again—Upper Egypt still more beautiful than



the Delta. One runs along for hours a canal that irrigates all the country ; it is filled with bathers clad solely in the sun-burnt bronzing that covers them ; they are there by hundreds swarming in the water like frogs, and the passage of the train troubles in no way a modesty so little disposed to be scared. In fact, they do not appear naked to European eyes, so does their colour clothe them ; they seem like figures of the kind that decorate chimney timepieces ; their flesh looks like bronze, and if you did not see them move, you would take them really for statues beautifully sculptured.

It is about eight in the evening when the train arrives at Syout. I had travelled with two very agreeable companions, and we were all three going to lodge at the French vice-consul's, a Coptic merchant, and one of the richest of the town. Our host had sent us to the station an interpreter, magnificent asses, and a dozen drivers carrying great lanterns, brilliantly clean. On getting out of the train, groups of Arabs, lighted by lanterns, got around us. The reflection of the light on these bronze figures gives them a strange aspect, almost wild. We get up on our donkeys, and, guided by our intrepeter, lighted and urged on by drivers, we arrive in the city. The night is dark ; we distinguish nothing ; our caravan alone shines in the obscurity. On entering Syout we go along, at racing pace, narrow lanes, whose houses appear of extraordinary elevation. At the noise we make in coming

great shadows arrange themselves against the walls ; it is with difficulty, if we can distinguish human forms when the rays from our lanterns fall on them. We go through a vaulted passage, which is evidently the bazaar : little smoky lamps feebly light up the stands of fruits and indistinct objects. Our asses continue carrying us forward with a dizzy speed, as in a fantastic march through a slumbering city. Every moment they leap over great beams of wood, that serve as bases for the gates of the different quarters ; for at Syout, as formerly at Cairo, every quarter is carefully closed at night by massive gates, which interrupt the circulation. Finally, we arrive in a great house, lighted up throughout. It is the residence of our host, Makarianz Dimian, who awaits us at his door, surrounded with two or three friends in black turbans and yellow robes, whilst a crowd of negro servants hasten to help us to dismount from our asses, and almost carry us into our respective chambers.

I should be very ungrateful if I repaid the hospitality of Makarianz Dimian by a recital of all the idle stories that circulate about him at Syout. Like all the rich Coptic merchants of Syout, he got rich, they say, by means of all sorts of traffic, of which this city has, or rather had, a monopoly, and which contributed especially to the maintenance of the harems. At present, his property is considerable ; his house is very fine, and it must be allowed that he receives there French

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travellers with a hospitality quite oriental. He is a man from thirty to five-and-thirty, but who appears, in fact, sixty. Short, lean, and bleary-eyed, he is broken down with fever and doubled up from fatigue. He has married a woman who was then eight years old, and who has given him two children ; a boy who is now at the Lycée of Marseilles, and a girl who died a few months before our arrival at Syout. Thanks to this family mourning, the harem was empty : the unhappy mother had gone to her family to give herself up to the outpourings of a grief, which at home, affected her husband's nerves. Makarianz Dimian's house has given me a very good idea of the kind of life of rich proprietors in Egypt. In this country, where the ancient manners have preserved all their originality, a man possessing, like Makarianz Dimian, a considerable fortune, is surrounded with a mass of clients, who come to salute him every day, and who live at his expense in flattering his vanity. They are not servants, they are really *clients*, in the ancient acceptation of the word—intimate friends, serving as ornamentation to the house. Every evening, Makarianz Dimian places himself in his selamalek, a kind of outer salon where receptions take place, and gives audience to his numerous clients. When he desires to occupy himself with business, he sends for his writer, a Copt like himself, who superintends a kind of office, where all the accounts are kept and the correspondence written. Every proprietor, a little



important, has his writer, who is always a Copt, a very important personage, a kind of steward of great ability, accustomed to deal with figures with a singular dexterity, but whose rare qualities of calculating and administration require to be watched with care, that they may not take a turn detrimental to his master. Besides his clients, his writer, and his clerks, Makarianz Dimian has at least a hundred slaves around him, for I do not speak of those who are distributed over his lands. I have already mentioned how easy slavery is in Egypt. Thanks to the extreme division of labour favoured by the multitude of hands, every slave has almost nothing to do. We had five of them to wait on us at table, where we were but four ; I noticed one of them whose sole occupation consisted in bearing his master's pocket handkerchief ; another slept at his door waiting for orders that never came. The horror of activity is general in Egypt. Every man who can get himself served spares nothing to obtain this desired object. It must not be supposed that the rich proprietors only have slaves, the servants themselves have them, and make them as much as possible execute their own work for them. One of my friends, who had lived long in Upper Egypt, told me that his cook possessed four slaves. But the rich proprietors have a very large number, whose maintenance costs them almost nothing, for living is remarkably cheap in the provinces of Upper Egypt. A family composed of

eighty persons, live there without too much trouble on an income of ten thousand francs. Many slaves are born with their masters ; they form part of the household, and the gentleness with which they are treated, does not dispose them to regret their liberty. Are they not as free as the fellah, and, moreover, a hundred times happier—they, who pay no taxes, who are not exposed to be beaten black and blue by the strokes of the courbache administered by the tax-gatherer ; who marry in their master's house, and see their children grow up there without having to trouble themselves about their maintenance and education, and demands to pay for them into the hands of greedy receivers, a multitude of iniquitous contributions ?

Makarianz Dimian had placed at our disposal his best asses : it was mounted on these excellent animals that we went over Syout and its environs. The city is delightful ; full of noise, movement, and sun. The bazaars, covered with a roof, flat or arched, broken by round windows, which admit long luminous rays into a mysterious demi-obscurity, had formerly a great reputation. They are in decay since the English, with the pretext of stopping the slave trade, have seized the monopoly of the sale of ivory in the Soudan. It is at Syout that they manufacture fly-flaps for all Egypt : there is also native pottery there, red, black and grey, of a queer use. I remarked, especially, among this pottery, kinds of rasps, having the form

of crocodiles, which serve the country women. . . . How should I explain? Well, it is known that the fellah women rarely wear shoes—a habit that sometimes obliges them to employ energetic means to give to their heels the flexibility and finesse one admires in them. The rasp in the shape of a crocodile is their most precious instrument of toilet.

A few mosques have remarkable cornices and minarets, but which appear mediocre beside those of Cairo. In short, to admire Syout, you must get out of it; the profile of the city is delightful, but the city itself is rather ordinary. What constitutes the principal charm are the gardens that surround it and gird it with a verdant belt. If you would enjoy these gardens and the surrounding country, you should mount a hill of the Lybian chain situated behind Syout, which, however, cannot be ascended without some effort. The savants go there to see the sepulchral grottoes ornamented with figures, inscriptions and hieroglyphics; and anybody can go there to contemplate the panorama, the finest perhaps, of Egypt—that which gives the most thorough and perfect idea of the country.

The background of the picture is closed by the spurs of the Arabic chain of mountains, which have an inexpressible gracefulness of contours and richness of colours. They describe an immense curve around a wide plain, where the Nile, the Souhagieh, and the canals running from them, form endless meanderings.

It is there where one recognizes the truthfulness of the description of Amru: "This large plain is at the same time a green and undulating meadow, and a garden ornamented with the most varied flowers." Fields of flax of delicate blue intersect the verdure in every direction; other parts of the country are of a vivid yellow; one might say it was a vast flower garden incomparably diversified. In the distance groups of palm-trees surrounding the villages, raise stately their heads in the sky. At the time of the inundation, all this plain changes into an immense lake, amid which the villages produce the effect of verdant isles floating on the waters. Then, according to the expression of Amru, "there is no longer any communication from the one to the other, except by means of light barks as countless as the leaves of a palm." Thousands of floating objects glide over the surface of this brilliant mirror, dotted here and there by the graceful tufts of the palms. But as soon as the water has retired, nothing equals the splendour of the verdure over which flowers are scattered all around. In the foreground Syout bristling with cupolas and minarets, very long and narrow, marks out its many-hued outline in the warmer light. On the left advances the Arabian necropolis filled with white crenellated walls, light and delicate domes, and innumerable constructions, whose colours are too dazzling to admit of a clear perception of their forms. This necropolis is so large that it seems as extensive

as Syout itself : it vanishes away in a desert—burning, vitrified, the intense reflexion of which is insupportable to the eye.

In proportion, as you descend the hill, whence you have been contemplating this panorama in its ensemble, each bit, viewed apart, again strikes the admiration. I remember especially, a vast field, in which many labourers were occupied, under the eye of a magnificent sheik, in harvesting. It is in the presence of pictures of this kind that one understands contemporary artists, who have sought in the simple and strict imitation of the East, the reconstruction of biblical scenes. It seems, in fact, that they transport you into a medium, grave, simple, grand, and luminous, where were unfolded the antique idylls of Ruth and Boaz, of young Tobias and of that holy man Job. It is the same splendour in nature, the same majesty in the personages, the same sweet and profound impression in the details—the same simple beauty in all. The more one regards the environs of Syout, the more souvenirs of the first ages of humanity, such as art has recently depicted to us, present themselves to the mind and awake the imagination. It must not be supposed that this country, verdant and smiling with flowers, is solitary ; it is, on the contrary, densely filled with life. In every artificial meadow, groups of buffaloes, horses, camels, sheep, asses, etc., give a striking animation and movement to the landscape. Little ragged fellahs watch these flocks and herds, around

which flutter white herons and birds of all sorts. Have you seen at the Museum of the Louvre those pictures of the Flemish school, which, to represent the terrestrial paradise, show us large gardens covered with flowers, where all the animals of the creation are met together; which are surrounded in the distance by luminous hills, and canopied with a sky of immaculate blue? Such is Egypt at Syout: a surprising combination of verdure and animal life, of movement and colour—the union the most complete and the most extraordinary of all that glows with hue, moves, and shines with splendour.

To repose a little from this sparkling scene, we went in the evening to take a walk on the banks of the Nile. Light palm groves ran along the low shores of the river, the sand passed from a rose tint to a golden, to finish in a dark blue, which was soon confounded with the violet of the sky. It is necessary to have seen the infinite variety of light in Egypt in order to know what clearness and brightness is. No word could render this immense series of diverse shades, sometimes of a blinding effulgence, sometimes of slumbering vigour, that finishes even by darkening profoundly, until the moon comes to replace the vivid tones of the day by its whitish glimmer, the intensity of which surpasses all that can be imagined. When one returns to Europe after having contemplated such effects, everything seems dull, dark, and dirty. I shall never forget the impression produced on me, on

my return, by the cliffs of Italy and Corsica. They appeared to me mouldy. I had accustomed myself to believe that the rocks could only be rose, blue, violet, opal, or white. I repeat, Egypt is but an immense play of light, an illusion of the eye, an optic dream without parallel, that would infallibly vanish, if ever its sun were clouded for evermore. But this danger, Heaven be praised ! is not to be feared, and whatever may happen, one may always say of Egypt what Lord Byron said of Greece :

“All but thy sun is set.”

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## CHAPTER XVII.

### ISMAILIA—THE DESERT—ARRIVAL AT THE TENT OF THE SHEIK SEOUD.

IT was not everything having gone to Syout. Though I had abandoned the idea of going up the Nile as far as the First Cataract, I should never have consoled myself if I had failed to visit the Suez Canal—this creation, really French, which will remain one of the grandest works of our century. I have often heard repeated in Egypt: Whence arise the pretensions of France over this country? Are there, like England, commercial and military interests of the first order? Can she not separate herself from it without compromising the route that leads to her most important colonies? This manner of reasoning is good perhaps for economists and disciples of the Manchester school. But the tangible interests are not everything in this world; they alone make not the grandeur and the glory of a people. If it were otherwise, besides, the English would hardly have more right than we over Egypt; for India, as Mr. Bright has demonstrated to them many times, costs them more trouble than it brings them profit; so that a common prudence would



counsel them to get rid of it as quickly as possible, and not work unceasingly to secure the liberty of routes that lead to it.

Egypt is associated with the grandest souvenirs of our contemporary history. Since the end of the last century, she has been bound to our national life by moral ties a hundred times stronger than material ties. This admirable country was in a certain way lost to the eyes of Europe, when General Bonaparte found it again and revealed it to the world, that knew it no longer. The Conquest of Egypt by the French armies is one of the most marvellous military epochs of history. According to a phrase, become almost ridiculous on account of being legendary, forty centuries have contemplated from the top of the Pyramids the innumerable swarm of Mameluke cavaliers coming to clash against the squares of our soldiers and dispersing in every direction, after having uselessly shattered themselves against these human walls, more immovable than walls of stone. All the glory of the campaigns of the empire has not eclipsed the luminous ray that these heroic combats have reflected from the brow of Bonaparte in the dawn of his genius and his fortune. We have been obliged to abandon Egypt ; but at the moment even, when we lost it militarily, the works of our savants, our jurisconsults, our administrators, made its moral conquest in revealing to Europe all the secrets of a country till then wrapped up in profound mystery. Even after

the studies of the *Institut d'Egypte* there remained yet a great enigma to decipher. The admirable monuments that the companions of Bonaparte had described, the representations of which, thanks to them, have penetrated everywhere, were covered with strange characters in which reposed unrevealed the souvenirs of history from the earliest times. It was the genius of a Frenchman who discovered also this secret ; and ancient Egypt, the Egypt of the Pharaohs, the cradle of human civilization and the arts, conquered in its turn by one of our country, comes to console us for the material loss of modern Egypt, which our armies had taken, and our generals, alas ! could not keep. A splendid success, but yet incomplete. Half separated from the Ottoman Empire, Egypt, under the guidance of a statesman of the first order, and of an indomitable captain, Méhémet-Ali and Ibrahim Pacha, seemed one day to rush forward to a new destiny. Who then presented herself at that time to sustain her, to guide her, to protect her on the way she took alone in the East, still living amid the Mussulman world falling from weakness and decay ? France ! It is known what vast and generous projects our country formed in 1840 for the future of Egypt. There also, unfortunately, the definitive result has not responded to the grandeur of the inspiration. Nevertheless, there has resulted from this bold attempt, singularly politic under its adventurous appearance, a fruitful and sufficiently glorious

advantage. Egypt has obtained an individual existence, which has placed her in safety from those shocks with which the rest of the East has been shaken. The influence of France over this country was not exhausted. To restore to Egypt all her political, commercial, and military importance, it was necessary to resume the great designs of the Pharaohs, and make of it the maritime route of Asia ; an enterprise borne down with obstacles more difficult perhaps than the deciphering of the hieroglyphics. But France had to offer to Egypt one more man of genius, if genius, as Buffon has said, is made of patience, courage, and will. During how many years has not M. de Lesseps had to struggle against men to commence the cutting of the isthmus of Suez ? The subsequent struggle against nature has been nothing more than a mere trifle. After having conquered the jealousies of nations, the intrigues of cabinets, the troubles of politics, the resistance of opinion, it was not at all difficult for him to conquer the sands of the desert. That he might accomplish his work to the end, it was necessary that France should renounce all thought of personal ambition over Egypt ; for to open the isthmus of Suez was, everyone saw, to create in this country, so often fecundated by us, an English interest, with which we should consequently have always to count. And yet M. de Lesseps has not encountered in the French Government and public a moment of hesitation. The support they have given

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him has been energetic, constant, and devoted. France has many faults, and, since she has been unfortunate, they have been pointed out on all sides with much acrimony ; but she is the only nation that has expended unsparingly her money, her pains, her genius, and her blood for disinterested works ; she is not merely the soldier by right, she is the platonic pioneer of progress and civilization.

I should, therefore, have deeply regretted leaving Cairo without having seen the Suez Canal. Fortunately for me, M. Coulon, avocat of the Suez Company, and one of the men that does the greatest honour to France in Egypt, either through his character or his abilities, undertook to show me the canal from Ismailia to Port Saïd. The project was to be complete. Besides the Suez Canal, we wished to pay a visit in the desert to an Arab sheik, a friend of M. de Lesseps, and who proved himself during all the cutting of the isthmus our faithful ally. I say we, for I was not alone with M. Coulon ; we had three more travelling companions, including a lady, charming, *spirituelle*, and courageous, who was not at all frightened at the fatigues of our excursion, and who supported them all through with admirable good humour and gracefulness. It will be seen, however, that we did not arrive without trouble at the Arab sheik's, and that all the accidents of an adventurous life of the desert are not alluring. There is nothing more prosaic than the journey from Cairo to Ismailia. It is accomplished

by railway, without the least incident, in very comfortable carriages, furnished with excellent persiennes that keep off the light and heat. Ismailia is the type of the artificial town. It has risen in the open desert, amidst arid sand, in a region where there was not, before its foundation, a drop of water nor a blade of grass. In front of the town extends now Lake Timsah; but Lake Timsah, in spite of the depth of its waters, is as artificial as the town of Ismailia itself. It is a simple depression of the land which M. de Lesseps knew how to turn to account with ability. On the 27th of April, 1852, was laid the first stone of Ismailia. Twenty thousand labourers were working in the environs. To quench the thirst of this population, it was necessary to expend 8,000 francs a day; water cost 40 centimes a head. As to the soil, it was obtained from the matter dug out to form the canal. Houses have gradually increased on this arid soil; fine enclosures surround them, and nothing is more picturesque than this pretty oasis, where everything, the plants as well as the buildings, have been brought together by human efforts. There are splendid gardens at Ismailia. The finest of all belongs to M. Pierre, a very nice man, who has the charge of the maintenance of the hydraulic apparatus that sends water to Port Said, a town originally as arid as Ismailia. Mr. Pierre's garden produces all the flowers and fruits of Egypt and India. One sees there very pretty lawns, not of grass, but of that particular plant

which is a substitute for it on the banks of the Nile and in the desert ; one admires there shady avenues, cool arbours, elegant and bushy clumps. The owner, who showed us his garden with pleasure, made it a point to conduct us to a charming little nook, which represented, in his view, with striking reality, a landscape of the Vosges. To create on the isthmus of Suez even something that recalls the Vosges, is it not, if only in the not-impartial eyes of an owner, a triumph of human genius almost as remarkable as the Pyramids or the Serapeum of Memphis ?

We dined very well at Mr. Pierre's : then we went to take a walk as far as the Canal of Suez. We pass at first before a great palace, very heavy, like all the modern palaces of Egypt, and whose desolate aspect made one melancholy. Ismaïl Pacha had it built simply to give a ball to his guests there at the opening of the canal. Since that ball, the palace has been shut, and the desert wind blows incessantly into its great uninhabited halls, which one day, or rather one night, were glittering with colour and light. This is what they call *faire grand* ! Further, on the bank even of the canal, stands a chalet, formerly elegant, built there to permit Ismaïl Pacha to show the Empress Eugénie the perspective of the canal disappearing in the waters of Lake Timsah. This chalet has suffered the fate of the palace. The chamsin has almost decapitated it. Illusions of human greatness ! When Ismaïl Pacha and the Empress Eugénie at the height

of greatness, power, riches, and enjoyment, came from this chalet under a blazing sun to the fêtes, of which the East, even at the time of the Caliphs, even at the time of the *Thousand and One Nights*, had never seen the like, could they have suspected that one of them would be dethroned and dishonoured by bankruptcy, whilst the other, a hundred times more unfortunate, would weep under the gloomy sky of England, the loss of her empire, her husband, and her son? It is not necessary to go and contemplate in Upper Egypt the ruins of Thebes, of Luxor, and of Karnac, to meditate over the profoundness of human revolutions, the great downfalls that succeed to the most glorious successes, the prodigious chain of triumphs and catastrophes that constitutes the brilliant and mournful course of history. It is sufficient to regard at Ismaïlia, from the top of one of those sand hills, which the winds of the desert incessantly raise and disperse, these modern palatial edifices already even in ruins, and that immense undulating plain, where, during the fêtes of the opening of the canal, thousands of men, Mussulmans and Christians, gathered from the four quarters of the world, had come to celebrate a brilliant victory of human genius over inert nature. However little one may be given to philosophic reflections, this spectacle is full of sadness. The thought of historical subversions so near to us, of which every object bears the living and throbbing trace ; does it not touch us still more

than tragedies, long buried in oblivion in the darkness of past ages, whose vestiges erudition alone has discovered, and left wrapped in a cloud of conjecture?

One sees at Ismaïlia but a shred of the canal, a shred narrow enough, for it is only seventy yards wide, and which seems more than it is, in reality, on account of the elevation of the dunes in which it is dug out. But if by chance a steamer, one of those steamers that look enormous when they are examined separately, passes the canal, the real proportions are then immediately re-established; the steamer is at her ease in the canal, notwithstanding the considerable dimensions of her hull, and the great height of her masts. Nevertheless, it is not at Ismaïlia that you should see the canal. On the other hand, one never tires of looking on Lake Timsah; it is more beautiful than most natural lakes. In the day its bluish tint is set off with singular vigour on the yellow background of the desert. At night, lighted up by numerous luminous buoys, for the guidance of vessels, it produces perhaps a still more striking effect. We occupied the chalet of M. de Lesseps, though he was not there. But absent or present, his hospitality is all the same; his door is always open to travellers. In the evening, on the balcony of this chalet, the sight of the steamers stopping in the lake, the distant shadows projected by the sand hills, the illuminations of the buoys, and above all, the firmament besprinkled with stars, was magnificent. And how resist the



impression of this tableau, full of animation, when one reflects that, a few years ago, there was nothing on the spot where we stood—neither houses, nor trees, nor lake, nor ships, nor lights—nothing but the desert, immense and silent, under the glittering vault of heaven.

After having well slept, in spite of these moral reflections, in the chalet of M. de Lesseps, we started the following morning at six, in one of the prettiest canoes of the company. The sun rose in a reddish mist, which was reflected on the sand and the water. Lake Timsah crossed, we were in the canal. The banks, as I have said, are very high; a few reeds grow there, but very few; they have vainly tried to plant trees on the slopes that form the sand hills, but the salt water does not suit vegetation. One is for a certain time closed up between natural walls. By degrees, however, the banks sink, the canal widens; it is one hundred and ten yards wide; sometimes little lakes, formed like Lake Timsah by depressions of the ground, run along one side or the other. The passage of the canal would be quite monotonous without the play of light which transforms everything in Egypt; the only incidents that chance to enliven it, are the flight of a heavy sea bird crossing the horizon, or the sight of an Arab on horseback, standing out in relief on the top of a hill against the shimmering background of the sky. It was at Êl-Kantara, near Lake Menzaleh, where we left the

canal. We were to take horses there, in order to arrive, after eight or ten hours' march in the desert, at the Arab sheik's, to whom we were to pay a visit.

Our cavalcade was composed of a guide perfectly black, mounted on a leprous camel. Behind him came one of us, perched on a fine grey dromedary; then the horses conducted by *saïs*; the heads of these were encircled with red turbans, ornamented with gilt, and their bodies were wrapped in great white tunics, with puffed-out trousers of the same colour. I say nothing about donkeys, donkey-drivers, and servants. As one advances in the desert, he is more and more struck by its beauty, peculiar, but startling. Quite near the canal, whose banks are so little elevated that they are not perceptible, great vessels are seen passing, that seem gliding in the sand. Nothing is more singular than meeting in the middle of the desert a ship with three masts, with its yards and cordage, its funnels, and its sails; and yet it is not merely on one side that ships appear; we distinguish others very clearly on the opposite side at infinite distances, sailing on a kind of transparent sea, dotted with little islands, filled with fantastic buildings, enamelled with coasts, forests, and marvellous palaces. Strange fascination of the mirage! During the whole of our trip, we had under our eyes, lakes, isles, shady groves, unreal objects, their forms full of graceful fancifulness. Sometimes the mirage comes

quite close to you. Then one believes he is a few steps only from a sheet of pellucid water ; one advances—it retires ; one advances again—it vanishes. The same mirage varies every minute ; the outlines of objects modify themselves, transform themselves, disappear and reappear like the movements of clouds in the sky. With such a spectacle, it is impossible to find the desert monotonous. And that is not all : every moment a few monticules, covered with stunted vegetation, present to the light a special reflector when it takes a fresh shade of incomparable delicacy ; all the varieties of grey and bluish shades present themselves by turns to the eyes, but with a finesse not to be found elsewhere. The desert is like the sea ; as uniform in its lines, as it is diversified in its effects and its tints ; only, except when the sun is perpendicular, and it is almost impossible to bear the dazzling reflection of the sand, its tints are of a softness that the sea itself does not present ; they go on melting away harmoniously as far as the horizon ; at this extreme limit, the air has trepidations equally luminous, that appear to be a moving prolongation of the desert.

About noon we had pitched our tent for *déjeuner* and repose ; then we recommenced our march, and the sun had begun to decline when a brilliant cavalcade appeared coming towards us. It was the sheik's sons coming to meet us. Mounted on frisky horses, clad in Arab costumes admirable for their amplitude

and gracefulness, accompanied by immense greyhounds, they had had a long chase before joining us. They were not, however, fatigued ; while we had much trouble with our horses, exhausted by the heat, to make them go on, theirs were running, or rather racing, in every direction with vertiginous rapidity. We saw them sometimes shoot off like an arrow in pursuit of some imaginary game, then return sharply to us, sometimes stop beside us with steaming nostrils, and set up a neighing that died away in the desert. The greyhounds, whose lank forms bore proofs of a life of perpetual exercise, gamboled around and outran them in their mad race. Thus escorted, our caravan took a fresh pace, bolder and livelier. Nevertheless, the evening was closing and we had not arrived. The sheik's sons preceded us, leaping in one bound the sand heaps that came in their way. All at once they plunge into a canal of moderate depth, but of fearful width, and begin swimming across. We follow as well as we could. The first arrived on the opposite side returns to be assured that all had safely passed. Admirable simplicity of desert life ! The two *sais* who held the horse of our lady companion sprang boldly into the water ; not, however, without having stripped themselves, by a rapid movement, of their long white tunics and puffed-out trousers. One of them who advanced first at some distance ahead of his horse without troubling himself about the deplorable incompleteness of his new

livery, thought only of taking care of the former, which he held over his head with two parasols like Cæsar carrying his Commentaries over the waves. His ivory teeth shone brilliantly, for the chill of the water made him open his mouth wide. The second *saïs* kept close to the horse in an attitude not less sculptural. I have never seen a *genre* picture more gay, and never, certainly, did the desert resound with more sonorous laughter, while the two heroes of the adventure, with their conscience quite at ease, appeared not to understand the demonstrative pleasure we had in crossing a very long, cold, and fatiguing ford. We had not yet come to the end, but we were in the sheik's domains. Great fields of corn formed kinds of oases in the middle of the desert. At every moment it was necessary to leap ditches full of water; an exercise very fatiguing to our worn-out horses, but executed by those of the sheik's sons and the greyhounds with astonishing agility. The night got darker, the stars were beginning to twinkle, and nothing more was heard in the immense obscure and silent space than the chime of a few crickets occupied with their nocturnal refrain. We were quite knocked up. At every moment our horses stopped, stretched out their necks, sniffed the air, snorted, and looked wistfully at their jaded sides. Their feet sank into the sand or the mud, and they drew them out with difficulty. The obscurity was so intense that at a few paces we could no longer see each other, and to find one another

again we were obliged to shout out, the sound of our voices leaving no echo behind. We were victims of the most deceptive illusions ; we took a series of hillocks for a group of tents ; we thought we were in the encampment, but if we called out there was no response ; we perceived a light in the distance, and we advanced with a good heart ; it was only a star rising on the horizon. It is impossible to imagine the sensation of profound gloominess of such a night in the desert. Not a tree, not a shadow rises before the eyes ; no sound cheers you up ; all is flat and mute to infinity. At last, after two or three hours of this desperate march, the barking of the dogs is heard, and a few lights, no longer illusory, appear. We come against some blackish masses which turn out to be sleeping camels ; they wake up uttering their disagreeable, harsh grunt. But no obstacle stops us till we arrive at an immense tent wide open before us, filled with inviting cushions. It is lighted up by those great lanterns that are seen everywhere in Egypt. A good fire burns beside it, and before its red flames stand out the shadows of some Arabs. A superb sheik, clothed entirely in white, quite luminous in the obscurity, advances towards us with exquisite dignity and gracefulness. We were welcomed by the Sheik Séoud.

## CHAPTER XVIII.

### A NIGHT IN THE TENT—SAN—LAKE MENZALEH, PORT SAID.

THE reception from the sheik was everything that could be desired for repose from our fatigues. He had placed around his tent great mattresses covered with soft carpets, the work of women of his harem. It was on these divans, got up on the spur of the moment, that we stretched ourselves with delight, while the sheik did us the honour of his camp, and his servants hastened to offer us their services. Around the great fire that flamed before us, some Arabs, seated on camel saddles, or squatting on the ground, were picturesquely grouped; some among them had superb heads, eyes of incomparable fulness and brightness. Long hair falling from their coufiehs on their shoulders gave to their physiognomy, already so expressive, an indescribable originality in perfect harmony with the scene which they seemed to be playing under our eyes. A few negroes mixed timidly with them. From time to time we saw appearing also from behind a canvas, that separated us from the harem, inquisitive heads, feebly lighted

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by the glow of the flames ; they examined with surprise all our movements. One of the Arabs beside the fire was pounding coffee in a metal mortar ; he struck the grains in cadence, and every time he raised the pestle, he rang lightly the side of the mortar, in order to know, according to the degree of intensity of the sound, whether the coffee was sufficiently pounded. These silvery notes, mixed with the subdued murmur of the groups, the low growling of the dogs that came to warm themselves near the fire, and all in the profound silence of the desert, produced a strange effect. The Sheik Séoud surrounded us with considerate attentions ; but with a reserve in the best taste, he seemed to leave us to our impressions, which were lively enough in presence of a picture so new for most of us.

We were not, however, at the end of our trials. The dinner-hour had arrived. We had spoons and forks in our baggage, but it would have been indelicate to have made use of them. The sheik had ordered to be brought in a great tray charged with dishes, around which we sat on camels' saddles. He placed himself beside us with one of his brothers, a personage not very elegant, whom we had named the Sheik Cannelle, because he took incessantly pieces of cinnamon from a bag suspended from his belt, and chewed them with evident satisfaction. The sons and the nephews of Séoud prepared themselves to serve us. We were pressed in by a kind of human hedge. I do not know



what impression we produced upon this multitude of spectators. What is certain is, that we made rather a pitiful face when we were obliged to dip our fingers into the dish, into which even the Sheik Cannelle plunged his long perfumed hands. As to the Sheik Séoud, who, thinking, no doubt, we were embarrassed with the bigness of the bits, boldly seized a chicken in the palm of his hand, and in a moment tore it into a score of pieces. Then, selecting a bit that he esteemed the most delicate, he offered it with a smile full of gallantry to our lady companion, who, very much terrified at this Arabian politeness, found it necessary to respond by smiling also. The dinner was abundant. Dishes succeeded dishes ; but it was with the three fingers of the right hand that one helped himself to the *crèmes* and the *confitures* as well as the wings of the chicken. The sheik's sons went around us holding gargoulettes filled with water in their raised hands to serve us to drink. In spite of our awkwardness at the new habit, we managed at the end of the dinner to eat like true Arabs ; the first repugnance overcome, our gaiety was all the more lively. At the end of the repast, a black slave passed round at first a cup of cinnamon of very agreeable taste, then a cup of coffee, prepared in the Turkish fashion.

We were too fatigued to prolong much the sitting up, though the sheik, who conversed very well, was very desirous to learn from us why France had changed

her Emir, and had replaced Marshal MacMahon by M. Grévy. He comprehended badly the mechanism of the Republic, and I doubt if we succeeded in making him understand it better. Soon tired of talking politics, we stretched ourselves, dressed as we were, on the mattresses and carpets in order to try to sleep. But endless noises kept us awake. In a tent joining ours, some Arabs were talking with animation : outside, camels were grunting, buffaloes roaring, and horses neighing. All these animals were installed in the camp, living, in fact, *en famille* with their masters. In the middle of the night, a horse that had got loose set everybody in a fright ; it was a tremendous row. In the morning, as soon as daybreak, the noise became still more lively : everyone saluted the aurora in his own way, and the chorus altogether of these different ways was deafening. We rose, however, refreshed. Our host had been up some time giving orders to his numerous servants, who drove the flocks and herds to the pasturages ; women were shaking milk in a great leathern bottle to make butter ; children, half-naked, were frolicking in the sand : the desert stretched far away out of sight ; a light haze, iridescent with the light of the aurora, seemed to cover it with an unobtrusive veil.

All the friends of the sheik came from their respective encampments to salute us. We saw them appearing in the distance, mounted on horses prancing proudly, dressed in their magnificent costumes and

carrying, slung over their shoulders, immense carbines that glittered in the rising sun. They were going to give us, for our amusement, some hawking sport, and I fancied myself already on the point of contemplating some delightful *tableaux* of the *genre* of Fromentin. Unfortunately the game was missing, the season not being favourable. We were therefore obliged to be satisfied with an artificial sport. A stuffed buck, from which the eyes had been torn out, served as a bait ; the empty eye-sockets having been filled with some kind of meat. As soon as the falcons perceived, from the farthest point, this dummy, which two Arabs agitated violently to imitate the bounding of a buck, they threw themselves on the place of the eyes where they found abundant food. The falconers excited them with their vibratory cries. The ferocity with which these birds of prey tore out the fictitious eyes of this dummy, completely consoled me for not having witnessed a real hunt. To see living eyes torn out with ferine voracity must be a revolting spectacle. The family and friends of the sheik, who contemplate this savage scene, formed an admirable group. The Sheik Séoud had many children, who vied with each other in beauty, and nephews still more beautiful than his children. One of his nephews, clad in a large blue robe, with his hair plaited and falling over his shoulders, was a model of gracefulness, vigour, and agility. The two youngest sons of the sheik were scarcely inferior to their cousin. The elder, named

Abdul-Aziz, was eleven ; I have never seen a countenance more naturally melancholy ; all the vague loneliness of the desert was reflected from his soft and timid eyes. The second, eight years of age, seemed, on the contrary, full of sportiveness and spirits. I had noticed him the evening before, for his impetuosity on horseback. It was he who galloped the fastest, who threw his carbine into the air and caught it again with the most striking dexterity. He aimed and fired now and then at some imaginary game, and rushed on the pretended victim with the rapidity of lightning : the folds of his mantle and coufieh agitated by the wind, displayed in a charming manner this little intrepid and delicate creature—a delightful spectre that one might have taken for the winged spirit of the desert.

On our departure, the sheik and all his suite made it their duty to accompany us, executing around us the most elegant fantasias. After having exhibited to us a mad race, these proud cavaliers stopped abruptly at a certain distance from us, on the line even of the mirage. There they stood out in relief—their slim figures, their hands bearing on their hips, their steeds stretching out their heads to draw through their wide-open nostrils the desert air, and with their long tapering tails floating on the wind. At the extremity of his dominions the sheik left us, after having embraced us one after the other ; but his sons accompanied us as far as San, the ancient Tanis, in the ruins of which we were to breakfast.

The arrival at Tanis by the desert surprises one with a sudden chaotic appearance. After having traversed a series of elevated hillocks, where the cavaliers seen at a few paces take gigantic proportions, we perceived all at once a deep valley bounded by a range of hills, absolutely red, but which were indebted for this colour merely to the debris of ancient potteries, so very abundant that they covered the sand everywhere. On this scarlet background stood out in relief, a sort of cyclopiian wall formed of immense pink blocks, which one might fancy to have been thrown down by chance in absolute disorder. Our Arabs galloping on, grouped themselves against this rocky mass, as if they had the secret instinct of forming picturesque effects. On advancing, we discover behind this confused heap of immense stones, fragments of obelisks, sphinxes still intact, colossal statues half sunk in the ground, columns ornamented with capitals with the flower of the papyrus, and monoliths of all sorts scattered far and wide over the ground. It is all that remains of Tanis, the city preferred by the kings Hyksos, a spot ever celebrated by the continence of Joseph and the relaxed manners of the wife of Potiphar. This unhappy wife of Potiphar has remained in the memory of hypercritical moralists, who have given a severe judgment, as the most complete type of matrimonial debauchery ; and no one remembers the extenuating circumstances that explain, if they do not justify, her conduct. The Bible says in

express terms that Potiphar was an eunuch\* of Pharaoh, which was absolutely not improbable. At the present time certain eunuchs do not limit themselves to one wife only, they have quite a seraglio. But notions are less austere than formerly ; for one is no longer scandalized ; on the contrary, one laughs uproariously whenever are produced in their houses scenes of Biblical manners. I have searched in vain at Tanis, for a shred of the famous mantle of Joseph. There is no longer the least trace of it. Nothing indicates there the locality of the famous scene, whose souvenir, quite moral, has lived longer than the monuments of stone near which it was enacted. This reflection is very encouraging to virtue, but it satisfies curiosity less. Tanis, unhappily, has not sheltered men always so chaste and intelligent as Joseph. That is the reason the prophet Isaiah never ceased to heap on it sarcasm. "The princes of Zoan are become fools, the princes of Noph (Memphis) are deceived," he said. And Ezekiel, joining threats to sarcasm, added, "And I will make Pathros desolate, and will set fire in Zoan, and will execute judgments in No." All these previsions are realized. The hills now near Zoan, or Tanis, appear red by the avenging fire. But we had not gone there to ascertain the truth of prophecies : we had gone there to breakfast, and as

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\* Such is in fact the exact meaning of the Hebrew word *sziss*, faithfully translated by the Vulgate.

the Sheik Séoud had made us bring a fine lamb roasted and garnished with rice in the Arab fashion, we hastened to do honour to this delicate dish. One would hardly believe how much philosophical meditations on the ruins of empires joined to the air of the desert, whet the appetite.

From Tanis to Port-Saïd the journey is made by water. We embarked at first in a flat boat, propelled sometimes by a pole and sometimes by towing by a dozen boatmen, who sing, whilst working, monotonous ditties. It was our object to arrive thus at Lake Menzalèh, where we were promised, in order to continue our journey to Port Saïd, the finest dahabieh of the lake. If it was the finest, what then were the others? We were five crammed in a little cabin, where there would not have been too much space for three, without air to breathe, but with the accompaniment of a strong odour of stale fish. Our dahabieh was used in ordinary by the fishermen. Lake Menzalèh contains countless multitudes of birds and fish, and there is just as much shooting as fishing there. As its waters have no depth, the dahabieh, driven by a brisk wind, grates along the sand with a dull sound. It was necessary to have been enlivened by the incidents of a charming excursion, to have borne with any pleasure this way of traversing the water. The boatmen told us, for our consolation, that if the wind went down we should remain wandering about the lake for twenty-four hours. Fortunately the wind did not go

down. About two o'clock in the morning we were, not at Port Saïd, but at the point where Lake Menzalèh ceases to be navigable. The boatmen then took us on their shoulders and carried us as far as the Suez Canal, where a large bark with eight rowers of the company was waiting for us. The night resembled our European nights rather than Egyptian nights. The sky was scattered with clouds ; the light crescent of the moon brightened their extremities with a silver fringe ; the water sparkled under the oars of the boatmen ; but we were worn out with fatigue, and in spite of the charm, quite European, of this nocturnal passage, it was with joy that we saluted the black walls of the Hotel Hollandais, rising like a kind of citadel above the waves.

Port Saïd is a town not less artificial than Ismaïlia ; it has been created by the hand of man on a slight band of sand ; its deep basins, filled at present with ships, have been scooped out by means of dredges ; its quays and its jetties have cost heroic efforts. But while Ismaïlia is a town little animated, Port Saïd, situated at the opening of the canal, has the animation, movement, and noisiness of a great port. When one contemplates from the terrace of the Hotel Hollandais, its immense workshops, its streets in straight line, its European buildings, its port where are circulating incessantly barks, canoes, barges, and boats, it is impossible not to admire again the might of human genius and the wonderful results of its



struggles against nature. In front is the Mediterranean ; on the right, an immense desert quite level, which stretches as far as Arabia ; on the left, Lake Menzalèh ; and behind, the long ribbon of the canal, which vanishes away in the distance in a mist. The day I passed Port Saïd, twenty vessels were in the canal. I saw two or three wending their way into the great basin, followed by embarkations of all kinds that served as an escort ; in the evening, after dark, they were still distinguishable by the lanterns at their mast-heads. They stop the boats at night, at Port Saïd or Ismaïlia, for fear of accident. In presence of this movement, this commercial life, I could not help thinking that M. de Lesseps is one of the most fortunate men of our century. Not merely did he conceive a grand work, but he executed it throughout, without a single expectation having been disappointed, without any deception having mixed with his success. In short, his most ambitious hopes have been fully realized.

But who knows what is reserved in the future ? Perhaps some day the Suez Canal will become, like the Bosphorus, the object of belligerent rivalry between nations ; perhaps sterile blood may flow over the land already bedewed with the fecundating sweat of the brow ! Still, for the present, never has human work been more pacific, nor more efficiently contributed to the happiness, the riches, the power, and concord of all.

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## CHAPTER XIX.

### THE FELLAH.

THE fellah is the most ancient possessor of the Egyptian soil ; numerous conquerors have passed over him, like scourges, more or less durable, but ever cruel, without modifying in any way his physical and moral condition, without affecting the essential features of his physiognomy. He is to-day what he was thirty-five centuries ago, after the expulsion of the Hyksos, what he was probably from the first dynasty, at the dawn of history and civilization. A papyrus preserved in the precious collections of the British Museum, has transmitted to us a picture of rural life during the nineteenth dynasty, that one might believe to have been extracted from one of the numerous reports published these last few years by European delegates, on the condition of the Egyptian peasant. It is a letter from one, Amene-man, librarian of Sesostris, writing to the poet Pentatour, author of a poem in praise of the great king, which is still seen graven on the walls of the Temple of Karnac : the translation of the letter is as follows :

“ One brings thee this letter of discourse (to make thee) a communication. I am told that thou hast abandoned letters, that thou art become a stranger to the practice of elocution, that thou givest thine attention to the labours of the fields, that thou turnest thy back to the divine writings. Consider ! Hast thou not represented to thyself the condition of the cultivator ? Before he harvests, the insects carry off a part of the corn, the animals eat what remains ; multitudes of rats are in the fields, the locusts fall, the beasts consume, the sparrows pillage. If the cultivator neglects what remains in the fields, the thieves ravage them. His implement, which is of iron, wears out. His horse dies drawing the plough. The scribe of the port arrives at the station, he collects the tax. There are people having sticks, negroes carrying palm rods. They say : ‘ Give us some corn,’ and one cannot repel them. The peasant is bound and sent to the canal ; they push him with violence ; his wife is bound in his presence ; his children are unprovided for. As to his neighbours, they are occupied far away with their own harvests. The occupation of a scribe is superior to all other kinds of work ; there is no tax on him. Know that ! ”

No tax, whilst the unhappy cultivator is crushed with them ! The scribe studies the belles-lettres, and forms himself to the practice of elocution, whilst the miserable fellah sees his harvests sold by the tax collectors, his wife and children in want, his whole

family led away to forced labour ! It is clear that Ameneman was a rhetorician, fond of striking contrasts and brilliant hyperboles. Insects and locusts fall more abundantly in his description than in reality on the fields of the fellah, and the pillaging sparrows make more noise in his prose than damage in the corn ; but with regard to the collection of taxes and the forced labour for the canals, nothing is still, more strictly correct than this gloomy and painful picture. The courbache, a kind of whip, of hippopotamus hide, has replaced the palm branches ; it is the sole difference between the past and the present, the only progress that has been made for thirty centuries—a cruel progress, for the palm was weak and brittle, while the hippopotamus hide is of a toughness and hardness that nothing impairs. Bourrienne relates in his curious memoirs, that on arriving at Damanhour, Bonaparte established his headquarters with the sheik of the town. His house freshly whitewashed, had a rather fine appearance outside ; but the interior was in a state of ruin quite inconceivable. Everything therein announced the greatest misery ; not a vessel entire, and in the place of seats, a few coarse mats, dirty and ragged. One found nothing, absolutely nothing in the house for the convenience of life. And yet Bonaparte knew the proprietor was rich. By degrees he inspired him with confidence, then he demanded, through the medium of an interpreter, why, being in easy circumstances, he thus voluntarily

deprived himself of everything ; he promised him that his confession should have no bad consequences for him. "Look at my feet," replied the sheik ; "a few years ago I embellished my house, and bought some furniture ; it was found out at Cairo, and they demanded money, because this expenditure proved that I was rich. I refused ; I was ill-treated ; I was obliged to pay. Since that time, I have confined myself to the strictest necessities, and I keep nothing in repair." "In fact," adds Bourrienne, "this old man walked with difficulty in consequence of the bad treatment he had received." Bad luck, in this country, to those who are suspected to be well off ! A hundred spies are always ready to denounce them. It is only by the external signs of poverty that one can escape the plundering of the State, of cupidity and barbarism."

This habit of dissimulation, this impassibility in suffering, are become the essential parts of the character of the fellah. Must we believe, according to Darwin's theory, that in consequence of their being transmitted hereditarily, they have arrived at constituting a kind of special faculty in the race ? What is certain is, that the Egyptian peasant considers himself dishonoured if he pays any tax whatever on the first demand ; his wife, his children, his neighbours, would scorn him as a coward shrinking from pain. When the collector arrives in his village, the fellah swears by all the gods that he does not possess a piastre, and receives with courage as many lashes of the cour-

baché on the soles of his feet as he can bear, without being quite lacerated. If he succeeds in slipping off by these means from the least part of what he owes, or of what is unjustly claimed from him, he does not regret his scars. It must not be supposed that he feels the least humiliation in submitting to a punishment which Europeans would find disgraceful; the shame would be, as I have said, to shirk it by paying. "The strokes given by a master are an honour," says an Arab proverb; another proverb of the same origin is still more explicit, "The strokes of a friend," it says, "have the sweetness of currants."

Among the legends the most popular of Egypt, figures the story, no doubt apocryphal, but in no wise improbable, of a fellah, from whom the tax-gatherer claimed the sum of ten francs. During a month, he was conducted every day to the same spot, where he bore without complaining fifty lashes of the *courbache*. It was in vain that they claimed from him, at the moment when his sufferings seemed the most acute, the payment of his debt. He invariably replied that he had not got the ten francs that were demanded. Convinced at last by this cruel experience of the truth of his declaration, the tax-collector decided to let him go; but to signify to him his discharge, he administered to him with his own hand a smart blow on the cheek. This unexpected smack jerked out of his mouth a piece of ten francs which he had kept there in reserve a whole month, in case he could no longer support his

martyrdom. One may doubt the truth of this anecdote, but Bourrienne relates one of the same kind, of which the *dénouement*, instead of being comic, is a sanguinary tragedy. Sidy-Mohamed-el-Coraïm, Sheriff of Alexandria, had been imprisoned by order of Bonaparte, charged with treason. The following judgment had been given against him :

“ Having proofs of the treason of Sidy-Mohamed-el-Coraïm, whom he had loaded with benefits, the general - in - chief orders Sidy-Mohamed-el-Coraïm to pay a contribution of 300,000 francs. In default by him to pay the said contribution five days after the publication of the present order, he will have his head cut off.”

“ Coraïm,” says Bourrienne, “ was to go from Aboukir to Cairo, in order, in accordance with his demand, to justify himself of what he was accused. Arrived at Cairo, they demanded from him again the hundred thousand crowns for his justification. He constantly refused to give them. I caused him to be informed one day by Venture, our interpreter, that if he would preserve his life it was necessary to pay what was required from him for shutting our eyes on his treason; that I assured him the general was decided to make an example. He was a very fine man, whose position interested me. ‘ You are rich,’ I said to him, through Venture, ‘ make this sacrifice.’ He sneered and replied, ‘ If I am to die this moment, nothing can save me from it; if I am not to die, why

give them ?' He was executed at Cairo, September 6th, 1798, at twelve o'clock ; his head was paraded through the streets of the city."

The late financial minister, whose end was not less tragic than that of Sidy-Mohamed-el-Coraïm, knew the fellah thoroughly, for he was a fellah himself, and all the instincts of his race had developed and expanded in him. A possessor of immense treasures, he hid them from every eye and enjoyed them in the most profound secrecy ; it required his disgrace and his death in order to reveal to the public the extent of his fortune. It was by means of the courbache that he had collected enormous sums, wrung without pity from the misery of his countrymen. No one was more in the secret than he, of the tricks, by means of which the fellah tries to dissimulate what he possesses ; he knew besides, the exact number of strokes with the stick necessary to compel him to reveal his secret. Therefore, during his long ministry, the soil of Egypt had been turned over to its depth everywhere. All the hiding-places had been sounded, every clod of it had been raised ; he had, in vulgar parlance, "sweated" the dazzling revenues that had deceived Europe on the true wealth of the country, and on the real extent of its resources.

In general, the public, with regard to Egypt, take old common-places that date from Herodotus, and which are not on that account more conformable to the truth. We suppose that the soil of this marvel-



lous country is inexhaustible, and that it produces without labour the most abundant harvests ; that it suffices to scatter a few grains on the Nile earth and allow them to be trodden in by the cattle, to obtain every year three splendid harvests. This pretty agricultural romance is a pure mirage. In Upper Egypt they are satisfied, in fact, with furrowing the soil with a stick, and then scattering over the surface some seed that sinks in gradually of itself : but then they obtain scarcely one or two harvests. In Lower Egypt, on the contrary, they obtain the three legendary harvests, or at least five harvests in two years ; but it is at the expense of very much labour. We must therefore subtract much from the current exaggeration of the fertility of Egypt. The palm trees even, which, according to the accounts of travellers, thrive without difficulty in the wide desert, require a most careful watering. Fortunately, hand labour costs nothing, or almost nothing. The fellah has too few wants to claim high wages. The modest amount of his necessities is prodigious ; he lives on a cake of doura and a few herbs ; his costume consists of a simple robe of blue cotton ; his house is a hut which serves him rather as a granary and a stable than a habitation ; he stores up there his modest provisions ; there he shelters his beasts, and as for himself, he sleeps in the open air ; if he is rich enough to have a spare robe, two pairs of papouches, and two turbans, he makes, for the purpose of a wardrobe, a kind of

earthenware cylinder, open at the top, and erects it before his door as a sort of column ; this, with a little oven of earthenware, completes his furniture. Therein are limited the necessary objects of his life. But if he suffers few of the evils that misery imposes on him, he suffers much in return for the pleasures it deprives him of. The fellah has the imagination and the caprice of a child. He is passionately fond of everything that glitters. His greatest joy is to cover his wife with massive silver jewellery, and to buy for himself showy arms, copper instruments, stuffs that are sold to him at exorbitant prices, and which are almost worthless. At the season of the harvest, clever dealers who know his weakness fleece him without mercy. As the fellah is absolutely deprived of foresight, he cannot resist the temptation of the moment ; he gives all he possesses in order to buy the most trumpery gewgaws. At the time of the immense prosperity caused by the great rise in cotton during the American war, he not only provided himself with a good stock of copper cooking utensils, but surrounded his house with divans on which sprawled white slaves tricked out in brilliant costumes. Alas ! The white slaves have not been long in disappearing, the divans are crushed in, and the cooking utensils, sold by the tax-gatherers, have fed the exorbitant contributions that have enriched for many years those who have "worked" Egypt.

The fellah is not merely passionately fond of

objects of luxury ; his love for a piece of ground of which, however, he is allowed merely the use, and for the temporary possession of which he has to pay with so much suffering, is invincible. "Alas ! Poor creature !" says a peasant woman to another, "thy husband hasn't got an inch of ground even." An outrageous insult, the most rankling that could be hurled at an Egyptian peasant. The fellah seems to be bound by some mysterious tie to that soil he has watered so many years with his tears and the sweat of his brow ; where he has seen pass over in their turn so many conquerors—Ethiopian, Persian, Greek, Arabian, Turkish and French ; where alone he has remained amid this perpetual flow and ebb of military hosts, that have come successively to snatch from him its products, without having been able to dislodge him. After all, is he not at least the true, sole, eternal possessor of it ? In spite of revolutions of laws and titles of properties, it is only him that the stream of history has never uprooted from a land he fructifies with admirable constancy, whilst others are satisfied in carrying off its fruits in rapid razzias. Therefore I do not know what harmony, I do not know what singular close connection is established between the land of Egypt and the fellah. It is the result of a secular union that no revolutionary subversion has troubled. The fellah loves the land, not for the profits he gathers from it, inasmuch as these profits have always been plundered from him by the cupidity

of a conqueror ; he loves it for itself, for its poetic beauty, which he comprehends by instinct, perhaps, even for the suffering that it occasions him. Are there not many unhappy creatures that feel a vague sentiment of irresistible tenderness towards the places where they have suffered, toiled, and moiled, and lived ?

The basis of the character of the fellah is a melancholy meekness, a fatalistic resignation, which is not wanting in either dignity or grandeur. It must not be supposed that the fellaheen race is corrupted and degraded by tyranny, as many other oriental races. The fellah is in the main honest ; if he opposes sometimes cunning, dissimulation and lying, to the iniquitous proceedings of his masters, his nature is still good, even when it yields to these grievous compromises. It happens that a fellah takes possession of property that does not belong to him ; pressed by want, he cribs, like that animal in the fable, from the neighbouring meadow, the length of its tongue ; but must we wonder that he has a not very exact notion of *meum et tuum*, even when he is purloined incessantly of his own harvest, when he finds it sold by the State to usurers, at the moment he is going to gather it, and when what he has sown with his own hands passes, without his knowing exactly why, into the hands of avaricious functionaries ? He is certainly not a thief ; he is too simple to have the regular instinct of rapine. He is still less violent ;

nothing, on the contrary, equals his natural gentleness, which very often goes as far as absolute effeminacy. In the time of the greatest dearth, the idea never comes into his head to pillage the State warehouses, which are, however, mostly, simple huts without doors, where anybody might enter if he liked. He has a profound respect for authority, whoever or whatever it may be, and this respect, strange to say, has nothing in it low or humiliating. The fellah bows before a superior force, but afterwards he holds up his head nobly. He bears courageously the most terrible treatment ; he cries out under the courbache, but when his punishment is ended, he harbours no ill-will towards him who has inflicted it ; he feels not at all humiliated before him ; one might say that he had the sentiment of a superior equality, that places positively on the same footing, the oppressor and the oppressed, that conciliates tyranny and slavery in a kind of universal fatalism, from which no one knows how to escape.

It is not the less true that the mental and moral nature of the fellah, depressed by centuries of oppression, is absolutely deprived of elasticity and vigour. If it is not low, it is at least feeble, and perhaps it has remained relatively well-disposed, only because it is incapable of great vices, as well as great virtues. The French merchants had offered one day to Méhémet-Ali, "regenerator of Egypt," a medal, which bore for

the exergue : " He knows how to defend nobly the honour of his country." This formula appeared very strange in Egypt: the expression, *honour of the country*, has no equivalent in the Arabic language ; the idea that it translates, the sentiment it depicts, are quite unintelligible to oriental minds. The Egyptian in general, is as incapable of feeling hatred as love ; he does not profoundly detest the tyrant who oppresses him, and it is very likely he would take a very long time to attach himself to the liberator who would deliver him. Accustomed to consider himself as the tool of superior forces, against which it is useless to struggle, to submit to the despotism of events, as to that of nature, he is totally destitute of moral dignity and of lively feelings of any nature whatsoever. And it is not merely the people who are thus constituted. Everybody in Egypt, from the highest functionary to the humblest fellah, bows and cringes to ask for *backchiche*. If you repel the applicant, if even you threaten him with a stick, he goes away thanking you, often smiling ; if you give them what they ask, they are not more moved by it. It is in vain one shows consideration for his servants, and does acts of kindness to them, they never feel the least gratitude for them. It is necessary almost always, in order to render them tractable, to have recourse to the courbache, or the toe of your boot. The Europeans, animated with philanthropic ideas, hesitate for a few months—the idea of beating a man

is revolting ; in course of time they do like everybody else. But what hinders these manual corrections from being debasing, it is, as I have just said, because they implicate no idea of humiliation. If the Egyptian people scarcely yield obedience without the constraint of brute force, it is because they know no other motive of action. They sacrifice nothing of their native dignity ; they are not demeaned inwardly by the stripes. There is in the resignation to necessity, when it becomes the essence even of the moral nature of a people, something to be respected. A sentiment of weakness, were it even excessive, is less demoralising than the poltroonery of races who might fight for their independence, who know it and feel it, but prefer doing nothing through interest or fear.

After so many centuries of servitude, it would be strange if there remained in the soul of the fellah the least disposition to resistance. All the energy that he had in him from the beginning of history has been gradually crushed out of him by the rigours of a lot so severe as no other people have known. If the fellah had been organized for the struggle, he would have been strangled in the revolt ; it is his facility in bending to the yoke—in weathering the storm by bowing down to the ground, like the reed in the fable, that bends but breaks not—that has enabled him to let innumerable conquerors pass over his head without losing anything of his personal vitality. To those who

would ask what he has done during the historical revolutions of which he has been the witness and the victim, he might reply like that personage of the revolution : " I have lived ! " He has lived, whilst all the nations that have conquered him by turns, after having long made capital out of him, have disappeared one by one, leaving him still in the place where they found him, and where others were to find him after them. " The people must be treated like the sesame," says an Arab proverb, " it must be trodden under and crushed to get oil from it." But, with this difference from sesame, the Egyptian people trodden down and pressed during thousands of years, has rendered all the oil demanded from it without having ever been crushed. The force of persistence in the fellah, is derived again from his excessive sobriety and his patience in misery. In this respect, he is to-day what he was at the time of the Pharaohs. He may be seen in the country clothed in a simple tunic, toiling in the rays of the sun, and stopping only to nourish himself hastily on his unpalatable bread and a few herbs that he alone finds edible. He does not move fast : he shows neither dexterity nor ability in his occupation ; but the continuity of his efforts ends in producing incalculable results. When evening comes, he most frequently drops down where he happens to be, and sleeps in the open country without any other covering to protect him from the cold of the night than his light clothing. As soon as day breaks,



he resumes his furrow where he had left it the evening before, and slowly pursues his interminable work. At other times he goes to the hut that serves him as a house, and where all his family are huddled together in sad promiscuousness; but this hut is so low that he cannot stand upright in it: however few provisions it may contain, it is impossible to find room in it; he is obliged to sleep outside against the walls, at the risk of exposing himself to the cruel disease of ophthalmia. Such is the life of the fellah: gloomy, monotonous, miserable. Those who attribute a sovereign power to the influence of surrounding conditions of existence,\* will not wonder that it has fashioned a race of men of faint heart, of limited intelligence, as yielding as the earth on which it lives, but forming human clods of admirable fertility, from which superior races have always drawn immense riches.

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“Subjection to different modes of life, produces in course of ages permanent bodily and mental differences.”—HERBERT SPENCER, *The Study of Sociology*, p. 338.

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## CHAPTER XX.

### A PLANTATION IN EGYPT, AND AN ARAB VILLAGE.

IF one desires to become acquainted with rural life in Egypt, he, evidently, must not remain entirely in Cairo, or be satisfied with taking a trip on the Upper Nile in a dahabieh, or a steam-boat. He who has not passed a few days, at least, in an Arab village, is completely ignorant of the mode of existence of the fellah, and has only very superficial notions of his habits. But, unless one be endowed with unusual courage, it is not easy to be induced to pass a few days in an Arab village. A European the least delicate, could not bear such a trial. Fortunately for me, I found means of establishing myself beside an Arab village, in a charming European house, which permitted me to study very closely the wretchedness of the Egyptian peasant, without, however, suffering myself. The financial crises that led Egypt within a step of its ruin, had for first consequence a depreciation, to an almost incredible limit, of the value of land. At the term of the collection of the taxes, when the fellah, at the end of his resources, had to pay important sums,

how could he satisfy the avidity of the treasury, except in selling his field at any price, and to the first bidder that presented himself? That is what he did regularly at every term, during two or three years. They are almost always usurers who present themselves as buyers: then land becomes an object of speculation, more or less recognized, and the general wealth of the country is diminished; but sometimes substantial agriculturists avail themselves of the occasion to undertake great enterprises of cultivation, which would triple the riches of Egypt if they became general. Unfortunately, these agriculturists are very rare; unfortunately, again, they are almost all English. A few of them, however, are French or Swiss. It is thus that a very able and intelligent Swiss has formed in the environs of Zagazig, at the village of Taouléh, an agricultural society, which he managed last winter most meritoriously, and whose profits one day will certainly be very considerable. Though these operations are quite recent, they already bring in from fifteen to twenty per cent., which is certainly a very respectable return. It was in this farm where I went to instal myself, in order to observe the fellahs. I had, I repeat, the double advantage of being quite close to an Arab village, and of enjoying at the same time, the comforts of a European house. One is quite surprised at finding in the centre of Egypt, at a short distance from the desert, amid palm-groves, an establishment where nothing is wanting—where the beds are inviting, the

library well filled, the furniture convenient and in good taste, and where the drawing-room is ornamented with an excellent piano, that resounds in the evening with the music of Gounod, of Verdi, and of Berlioz.

One year ago, nothing of the kind existed. The new colonists sheltered themselves in miserable clay huts, which were so unbearable in the summer months, that they were obliged to sleep out of doors like the ordinary fellahs, and to brave, like them, that terrible ophthalmia, which is the most constant and most detestable of the plagues of Egypt. But, little by little, all the comforts of civilization have penetrated into this half-wild district. A charming house, farm-buildings, stables, great warehouses filled with agricultural implements and machines, have all sprung up, as it were, from the sand of the desert. These constructions are erected, in fact, on an arid hillock, called a *com*, which forms a sort of a great island of sand, in the middle of cultivated lands. But the sand will disappear, for it suffices to sink wells in it and water it, to transform it into the most productive soil. The fellahs cannot understand how the Europeans come and establish themselves among them in a permanent way ; therefore they are persuaded that the new agriculturists are magicians, engaged in searching a treasure buried in the *com* : if they have erected such vast buildings, it is to hide what they dig up from every eye. The fellahs are, indeed, a little jealous of the treasure that is being stolen from them ;

but they console themselves for its loss with the hope that, when the operations are finished, the happy gold-diggers will quit the country, leaving their splendid buildings at the disposal of the inhabitants of the village of Taouiléh. In awaiting this delightful future, when the fellahs will repose on European beds, stretch themselves in Parisian easy-chairs, play Arab airs on a piano of Pleyel, and be able to say, like that wife of a wild democrat, who in 1848, strutted amidst the furniture of the Tuileries, "It is we who are the princesses now." The village of Taouiléh is moving a little, and is beginning to surround the new house. The proprietors get built at their own expense, very neat huts, where they attract the fellahs in order to have them more directly under their hand : the day when they see them almost all established around their dwelling, they will destroy the ancient village, the débris of which will furnish them with an excellent manure. There are found everywhere in Egypt, abandoned villages, that form thus mines of manure of great fertilizing power. God grant that many European agriculturists, creating centres of agricultural cultivation, may lead to similar movements of the population ! It would be rendering an immense service to the Egyptian peasants to teach them new methods of cultivation, to accustom them to receive regular wages for regular work, to form them to economy, to foresight, and to a spirit of enterprise.

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At the beginning of this work, the Europeans encountered, as they had to expect, an active resistance on the part of the peasants of the village of Taouiléh. One day even, with regard to a cow of a villager that had gone to graze in one of their fields, and which they had caused to be seized by one of their servants, a regular riot broke out against them in the village. They had no trouble to suppress it by European firmness and coolness, opposed to Arab turbulence and weakness. But if they had suffered this disturbance to go unpunished, it is clear that it would have been followed by a score of others. It was necessary then to make an example. They applied to the moudirieh (préfecture) of Zagazig, who ordered an inquiry. An Egyptian officer, accompanied by a representative from the French Consulate, came for that purpose to Taouiléh. The sheik of the village was called: he replied at first to all the questions that were put to him by absolute denials; gradually, however, he avowed everything and finally declared himself ready to bear the chastisement he had deserved.

In virtue of this inquiry the sheik of Taouiléh received in presence of the assembled village twenty strokes of the courbache on the soles of his feet. You would suppose, perhaps, that he harboured some bitterness on that account. Not in the least. The day following that even, on which he had received this severe correction, he came to the Europeans'

house to invite them to come and take coffee with him, and he has never ceased since then to show the greatest affability and respect in his attitude towards them. I was struck with the friendly and respectful expression that he preserved on the very spot he received his punishment in presence of those who had caused it to be inflicted on him. In Egypt a good horsewhipping certainly strengthens the ties of friendship !

I have just said that European agriculturists who came to establish themselves in the valley of the Nile, not for giving themselves up to rapid speculation, but to make there an honest and substantial fortune, would render immense service to the fellahs in teaching them new methods of cultivation, and especially in habituating them to enjoy regular wages. What contributes largely to the riches of Egypt is the cheapness of labour. The Egyptian peasant executes for one or two piastres, that is to say, for twenty-five or fifty centimes, work that one of our labourers would not undertake for three or four francs. It would therefore be ridiculous to bring into Egypt agricultural labourers ; but with the aid of a few capitalists, one might augment rapidly, and in considerable proportions, the riches of this admirable country. The fellah possesses no implements of husbandry ; most of the time it is with his hands that he digs out the canals for irrigation ; his plough is most primitive, and he fastens it stupidly to the necks of his oxen, who

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waste thus the greater part of their strength, which resides, as is well known, in the head and shoulders. His only tool is a sort of spade which one sees figuring even in the hieroglyphics, and which serves him without distinction for all purposes, for all kinds of work ; he uses it equally for turning the ground, squaring wood, building a house, or clipping a tree. But when one puts into his hands more improved instruments, he quickly learns how to use them. They introduced scythes into Taouléh, articles of great novelty in Egypt ; in a few weeks the peasants mowed exceeding well. The machines themselves do not astonish the fellah very long. How productive his labour would become if he were furnished with them ! It would not be necessary to have very expensive kinds, for nothing is more simple and more uniform than Egyptian cultivation. It would be an immense progress if the process of irrigation were improved and a few roads constructed. At present everything is carried on the back of a camel. If there were roads, a cart and a pair of oxen would be sufficient to replace advantageously twenty camels. All the work of the farm is not done indifferently by men or by women. The men would consider themselves dishonoured, for instance, if they cleaned out the stables ; it is a business proper for women only. Although it is very fatiguing it is hardly paid ; for it is admitted that a woman must not gain more than half the wages of a man. And they have to be very



cautious not to infringe this rule. A woman that was paid as much as a man would be convinced that she possessed some extraordinary merit ; she would soon take advantage of it to do nothing at all. The rougher the work in Egypt the lower the price. Fortunately, the fellah, however, be his labour ever so rough, obtains some wages at least. Most rich and powerful pachas, who make him work on their lands, consider that work as compulsory labour, legitimately due ; the most humane fix authoritatively a slight remuneration which the fellah never has the power to dispute ; he must either accept it or wear himself out gratuitously in the service of an inexorable master. It is this irregularity in the wages that has rendered the Egyptian peasant so improvident, so incapable of saving. As they never know if they are to be paid, or if paid even, at what date, they have contracted the habit of never thinking of the future, of living from day to day, with a complete indifference for the morrow in supporting their wretchedness, but ever in pursuing their dream of luxury. The woman who cleaned out the stables of Taouïléh wore boots of pearl-grey satin, with a robe on which she appeared to have accumulated all that she had removed from the stable. I have seen other women obliged to sell, to pay the tax, rings and necklaces worth for their weight of silver from eighty to a hundred francs. The miserable creatures who adorn their feet and their necks in this fashion have no other food than a few abominable cakes of doura, nor

other dwelling than those filthy huts I have described, and where large families, crowded in together, live in a promiscuousness as antagonistic to morals as to health.

Some effort, however, is necessary to accustom the fellahs to work regularly with the prospect of wages. They have an instinctive taste for independence which does not easily accommodate itself to the conditions of life of ordinary agricultural labourers. Free labour appears to them preferable to everything, and they who possess a few patches of land are satisfied with cultivating them hastily, in order afterwards to surrender themselves to their indolent nature. But since landed property has been escaping from them gradually for some years, they are obliged to resign themselves to a new existence. Good humour does not abandon them in this trial so painful to them. I have rarely seen a gayer sight than that of a party of labourers constructing a canal at Taouiléh. About forty women, children, and young people, clad in white and blue, were in active movement, carrying great baskets of earth to some distance from the canal, and then returning in forming a many-coloured procession. As the earth is very black in Egypt, it constitutes an excellent background of a picture for the vivid colours of the native costumes. The canal had to be finished that day even; but after examination it was considered that it would be better to work at it during the following day also. This good news quickly

spreading in the ranks of the workers produced there an explosion of joy. One day more of work was one day more of pay, and, consequently, one day longer, during which time one might be sure of not dying of hunger. Enthusiastic shouts rose everywhere. It was late, the day's work was finished, and everyone took the road to the village. The party of labourers, a few paces in advance of me, made the noise, and assumed the movement of a troop of schoolboys coming out of school the evening before a holiday : there were shouts of laughter, and frolicking, an incessant murmur that died away in the immensity of the open country already wrapped in the grey tints of evening. How easy it would be to render this miserable Egyptian population happy, who have known for so many centuries nothing but humiliation and suffering. Secure to them one or two piastres a day as wages for their work, prevent an iniquitous government from filching from them pitilessly all they gain. You need not give them every comfort, but you can save them from a dismal wretchedness ; the most wonderful of climates and the most tractable of characters will do the rest.

I have passed through the village of Taouléh several times, and as the other villages resemble it entirely, it will be sufficient for me to say a few words about it in order to give an idea of all those one meets with in Egypt. At a certain distance the aspect of an Arab village is wanting neither in gracefulness nor

in picturesqueness. Built almost always on an elevation amid a palm grove, it resembles a kind of dark island lost in the river of verdure of the valley of the Nile. But when you approach quite near, all changes. The first thing you see is a great pool of stagnant water where the children bathe, where the women come to fill their pitchers, where the dogs drink, and which spreads all around it a fœtid odour. When you penetrate into the lanes of the village, the sight is still more hideous : almost all the population congregate before the houses ; women crouching down with their chests quite uncovered are nursing their infants ; men are sleeping along the walls ; all the domestic animals are lying down beside their masters. If you look into the houses you will see, when the eye is habituated to obscurity, some heaps of corn or doura, a little earthenware oven, a mill in which they crush the grain, often a donkey or a calf ; the same compartment serving, as is known, as a granary, room, and stable. It is not uncommon in the middle of the day, when the fellahs are in the fields, that you pass through villages in which you will not see a single human being ; but heads of animals projecting over the tops of low doors look at you moving about with a curious eye. One would believe that these animals were the sole inhabitants of these strange constructions. A hut larger than the rest serves as a residence for the sheik ; it is there that the notables unite to discuss the common interests, and where the tax-collectors

establish themselves when they come down on a village. If the sheik is before his dwelling he invites you invariably to enter and take some coffee. It is, however, an invitation that one receives twenty times in a walk ; all the villagers a little well-to-do, vie with each other for the honour of receiving you. Take care not to accept it if you would not be infected through this dangerous hospitality.

In general, it is prudent to enter as seldom as possible into Arab houses, unless one be as clever as the natives in effecting a smart chase in his clothing. As the fellahs moreover remain in them very little themselves, the best way to observe them is to remain in the streets or at the entrance of the village. I remember having thus one evening witnessed a scene at Taouiléh singularly picturesque. The day had closed, and the night had come with that rapidity that suppresses almost completely twilight in Egypt. A red band, however, still coloured with a vivid tint the line of the horizon partly hidden by a palm grove ; it might have been described as a ribbon of fire serving as a fringe to the immense dark sheet of Egyptian country. On their return from the fields, the fellahs had established themselves on a large empty space before the village, and there they had lighted fires with dry branches in order to cook some small fish which they threw into the embers, and from which they drew them out half calcined to devour them greedily. They were arranged in a circle around

these fires, stretching out their hands towards the flames that gave brilliant tones to their black eyes, to their blue and white robes, and to their complexions already reddened by the sun. Happy, doubtlessly, from the success of their fishing, that permitted them to add a new diet to their too frugal ordinary, they broke out into peals of laughter, so that if the reflections of the fires gave them the look of demons, they were not, at least, maleficent spirits. The country around them grew gradually darker. One perceived however, in the obscurity large herds of cattle returning to the village; the fellahs who drove them played sweet and melancholic airs which moved me very much, for it was the only time I have heard in Egypt, in native music, a real melody. Gradually the firmament became covered with stars of dazzling splendour, the fires were dying slowly away, the laughter was getting feebler, and the last notes of the flutes were borne away in space, whilst Nature was about to enter into that mysterious repose of an Egyptian night, whose silence nothing troubles, not even the light breeze on the tops of the palms.

On returning to the European house, I found civilized life again. During the whole evening, I heard nothing but the tittle-tattle of Alexandria; for Alexandria is a city of *cancans*, if there ever was one, and this gossiping is, I suspect, what it has especially preserved of the manners of Cleopatra. Then when the conversation dropped, the piano, in its turn,

made itself audible. Sweet voices sang *La Captive* of Berlioz :—

“ Pourtant j’aime une rive  
Où jamais des hivers  
Le souffle froid n’arrive  
Par les vitraux ouverts ! ”

We were in the middle of January ; the windows were wide open, and we felt the moist mildness of the atmosphere. I have never been in a better condition to understand the poetry of Victor Hugo and the music of Berlioz, and I have rarely passed more delightful evenings.

## CHAPTER XXI.

### THE GOVERNMENT—THE RULING CLASS.

MODERN Egypt is the work of Mehémét-Ali: it was he who has created everything in this country—government, civil service, institutions, manners, customs, and characters. It would be difficult to find the example of another nation so completely modified by a man of genius. I spoke in a former chapter of the constant tractability of the fellahs; this tractability, which is the distinctive trait of their race, has not, however, always been so great as it is at present. "The obstinacy that the Egyptian peasants show in their hatred, and revenge," says Volney, "their obstinate animosity in the combats that are engaged in between villages, that point of honour they make it to endure the bastinado without divulging their secret, their barbarity, even in punishing in their wives and daughters the least failure of modesty, all prove that, if prejudice has been able to supply them with energy on certain points, this energy has only need to be directed to become a formidable courage. The riots and seditions that their tired patience excites sometimes,



indicate a latent fire that waits only hands that know how to agitate it, to burst into a flame. . . . When one man is killed by another in Egypt, the family of the deceased exacts from that of the assassin a 'retaliation,' the pursuit of which is transmitted from generation to generation, without ever neglecting it. . . . Often upon suspicion, the fellahs slay their wives and daughters. When I was at Ramli, a peasant walked about several days in the market, having his mantle stained with the blood of his daughter, whom he had thus killed ; the greater number approved it ; Turkish justice does not interfere in these matters."

When, after having travelled through modern Egypt, one reads such details of manners, it is difficult not to experience a sentiment of extreme surprise. If the fellahs resembled the portrait traced by Volney, and which the members of the French expedition have reproduced very often, there has been accomplished among them in less than a century, a transformation almost inexplicable. It would be in vain to agitate at present the dull embers in the Egyptian provinces ; no latent fire there threatens to burst into a blaze. Need I say, that one never meets there any longer, irritated fathers parading in the public places, a mantle stained with the blood of their daughters. The modern fathers exhibit rather an excessive indulgence than a cruel severity. It is probable that Volney and a few of the companions of Bonaparte, have confounded with the fellahs an intermediate

class, restless and courageous, who, under the rule of the Mamelukes, sustained in Egypt a remnant of warlike and revolutionary spirit. In every province, in every village even, the Mamelukes had agents, who communicated to the population their hatreds, their vindictive passions, and their wrath. They were the officers of an army always ready for battle. The feudal organization of the Mamelukes created over the whole extent of Egypt centres of permanent agitation. Like the lords of the Middle Ages, the Mamelukes were perpetually in campaign against one another; each of them employed his vassals to fight against his neighbours; war was then everywhere; peace existed nowhere. The Mamelukes besides, being in chronic conflict with the Pacha representing the Turkish power, there resulted from it a general habit of insurrection, that necessarily modified the native manners. For the first time for centuries, the fellahs learnt to disregard, to despise even, superior authority. They had always bowed down before a single and omnipotent power, and they were invited to pay no attention to the orders of the Sultan. Provided they were subject to a local chief, who was a declared enemy of the Ottoman Porte, they were not accountable to any other master. However tractable the fellah was, however accustomed he was to bow down before a supreme power, as under an invincible force, it was impossible that a system of government that reposed entirely on the spirit of revolt

should not have given it, in the course of time, the fierce spirited appearance with which Volney was struck in 1784. When Bonaparte took possession of Egypt, the Mamelukes were still all-powerful there, and their influence there had suffered no diminution. It was to religious fanaticism, that was attributed the terrible insurrection of the populace of Cairo, that the French army was obliged to suppress with so much bloodshed; in fact, religious fanaticism has been merely one of the secondary causes of this insurrection; there is to be seen in it principally, the last attempt of a military and landed aristocracy, menaced in its rights and properties, to resist the foreign conquest.

The power of the Mamelukes did not repose solely, in fact, on the institution of this admirable militia, which, established to counterbalance the authority of the Pacha, had ended by destroying it entirely, and by substituting for it a régime of military oligarchy, in which each acquired his share of power according to the extent of his forces. It had, besides, for foundation, a system of property that gave all the land to kinds of feudal lords, named *moultezims*, and reduced the fellahs to the lot of serfs attached to the soil. Everything lay in this vast organization. If it were desired to snatch Egypt from the barbarism of the Middle Ages, to make a modern nation of it, it was not sufficient then to crush the Mamelukes in a horrible massacre; it was still necessary to destroy the

*moultezims*, to suppress their privileges, to apportion out their immense properties, to intrust the lots to the fellahs, who thus acquired with the possession of the land a relative liberty, because they would not henceforth have to submit to local tyranny, and would be subject only to the general despotism of the Viceroy. Europe has known all the details of the sanguinary tragedy in which Méhémet-Ali exterminated the Mamelukes, with a mixture of cruelty and cunning that proved to what degree of tenacity the barbarian had clung to him under the man of genius devoted to contemporary civilization ; but she is still ignorant of the series of skilful, prudent, and far-seeing measures, worthy of a legislator of the first order, with which he had gradually suppressed in the provinces the feudal institutions, in order to replace them with a régime really modern. Through this, was produced a revolution similar to that which, in France, led to the emancipation of the communes by the alliance of the citizens, and middle-class, and the sovereign against the aristocracy. As, however, there never have been citizens nor middle-classes in Egypt, it was the people themselves, the agricultural class, the peasant, who has been emancipated by the central power ; and what again constitutes an essential difference between the two countries, is, that the people had done nothing to acquire their independence. The entire work had been accomplished by a single man. Méhémet-Ali encountered even in the Egyptian population, resist-

ances, he was obliged to overcome with that compliance united to violence, which was his ordinary method of government. Habituated to the feudal régime, excited by the *moultezims*, and what remained of the party of the Mamelukes, the fellahs obstructed sometimes reforms: they refused to pay the tax demanded of them in exchange for the land: revolts broke out in the villages. To give an idea of the manner in which Méhémet-Ali surmounted these obstacles, it will suffice to explain how he succeeded in calming a general insurrection provoked in a province by the establishment of an unpopular tax. Ibrahim Pacha set out for this province with the minister, who had been charged with preparing the distribution of the tax. Arrived at the principal place of the Moudirieh, (préfecture) he called together the rioters, listened to their complaints, feigned to accept their reasoning, declared that his father and he had been misled by false information, and, turning towards the minister considered guilty of this false information, he blew out his brains in the presence of the crowd, whom this act of summary justice instantly calmed. Of course, the tax was nevertheless collected; but the insurgents had been disarmed, and it was no longer possible for them to resist.

The European public is often surprised when it is said that there are not any, or hardly any, Turks in Egypt, and that, excepting the Viceroy, there is not to be met with in this country any independent

power, any national force, with which it is necessary to come to terms. It is not, however, difficult to understand how this situation has been produced. No doubt, the Turks conquered Egypt under Selim the First, and their nominal authority has never ceased since that time to be exercised there ; but in reality, a new conquest was soon substituted for theirs, and had little by little completely replaced it. The Mamelukes, who, till the time of Méhémet-Ali, were the real, the only masters of the country, who held in their hands, as I have just explained, the military power and the landed property, were not at all Turks. They were Circassians, sent very young into Egypt, in order to lead there a life of adventures, and who, dying without posterity, could not create a permanent aristocracy, a directing class inspired with regular traditions of government. The political power belonged to them entirely. As to the executive, it was confided, not to Turks destitute of all spirit of order, method, and sustained activity that the civil service requires, but to Copts, who had had the ability of rendering themselves indispensable in complicating in endless ways the public accounts, become in their hands a kind of occult science, the mysteries of which they alone can interpret. The Turks, therefore, played absolutely no part in Egypt ; they were the conquerors, but they were anything but the masters. Therefore, when Méhémet-Ali had destroyed the aristocracy of the Mamelukes and the

feudal organization of the *moultezims*, there existed no longer any intermediate agent between the people and the sovereign. If Méhémet-Ali had been but an ordinary despot, after having broken down everything that could oppose itself to his absolute power, he would have been perhaps surrounded with Turks and have governed with them. But his vast ambition was sustained by a genius not less vast. He aspired, not merely to rule Egypt, but to civilize it in organizing it like a European nation : now it was quite clear enough that he had not to expect any help from the Turks in such a work. In order to create an administration, a system of accounts, a military intendance, a germ of magistracy, Méhémet-Ali understood that it was France he should turn to. When quite young, he had seen the French at work at the time of the Bonaparte expedition, and the remembrance he had retained of them was accompanied with profound admiration. But with a surprising versatility of intelligence in a man without any instruction, and who, at forty, could not yet read, he knew how to appreciate Louis Philippe, as judiciously as Napoleón. He had become quite mad when the revolution of February broke out. As soon as he heard of it, he divined all its importance in spite of the feebleness of his mind, and he experienced from it a grief so profound, that it rendered his cure impossible. In his hours of mental alienation, the idea of the misfortunes of France tormented him unceasingly :

he desired to collect his troops, to arm his ships, and landing at Marseilles, to march to Paris, and re-establish the king upon the throne from which he had been pulled down by an unjustifiable insurrection. It was because Méhémet-Ali owed everything to France or to Frenchmen. His best, his most trusty auxiliaries were our countrymen. "Of all the Europeans who have worked for me," said he, "three only have rendered me great services; Soliman Pacha (Colonel Sève), Cerisy Bey, and Clot Bey. These Frenchmen are the first Franks whom I have known, and they have always justified the high opinion that I conceived of them since the Bonaparte expedition."

Thus Egypt, except perhaps in the early years of the Conquest, has never known a government by Turks: it has passed from the rule of the Mamelukes to the domination of a political class, composed of a majority of Europeans, and in particular of French. Hence it is, one sees there hardly two or three Turkish families really indigenous and enjoying an undisputed authority; the other Turks belong to all the Western and Eastern nationalities; they are young men, come nobody knows whence, brought by Méhémet-Ali, Abbas Pacha, or Sard Pacha, who have made their fortunes, as one is accustomed to make them in the East, but who have no root in the country, and who are indebted for their influence to the duties they fulfil there. I remember the astonish-



ment of a traveller, one of my friends, who had admired, on disembarking at Alexandria, a splendid Turk, a pacha of the finest type, whose good looks made him say incessantly : "What a Turkish look he has !" Upon inquiry, this Turk turned out to be a Pole. The principal leader of the movement, self-styled *national*, that took place last winter at Cairo, was a Greek.

A great number of Europeans who bear the title of bey and pacha, and who exercise the most important functions of the State, do not take the trouble even to disguise themselves as Turks. From all time, Egypt has been governed by French, Italians, Greeks, Syrians, without anybody ever dreaming of complaining of it. It is true, that at the end of a few years, these men of diverse nationalities resembled natives, so as to have been mistaken for them ; they contracted their manners ; they followed their habits ; they administered the country according to the same methods as they. The immense majority of the auxiliaries and courtiers of Ismaïl Pacha were equally Europeans. It was only on the eve of his fall, that the unfortunate Khedive tried to persuade Europe that he was obliged to surround himself exclusively with Turks ; but this comedy was so difficult to play, that nearly all the important parts had to be confided to factitious Turks, whose skins it was not necessary to scratch very deep to find the foreigner.

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It is not here the place to insist upon the character of the heterogeneous and floating class, who, since Méhémet Ali, has governed Egypt. I will say but equally few words on the manner in which it governs. We begin already to know it well enough in Europe. I will point out, however, one of the causes that have rendered this government intolerable, because it springs from manners rather than from political principles, and it enters consequently into the subject of this book. Quite a man of genius as he was, Méhémet-Ali, in his double qualification of Turk and despot, never troubled himself with material nor moral difficulties ; he hesitated not to force nature herself when she resisted him, convinced that she should bow down like men to the caprices of his mind and his will. He had brought into Egypt not only European administrators, but all the plants of Europe whose merits he had heard praised. Among these plants was a splendid dahlia. Placed in the open ground, in the full sun, at some distance from the kiosk of the pacha, the dahlia had flowered perfectly, without any one having attended to it. But someone, one day, having spoken of the beauty of the flower, Méhémet-Ali noticed it for the first time, and admiring it also, he ordered it to be put into a box and taken under the sycamore that shaded his kiosk. The gardener having ventured to surmise that the flower might well succumb to these operations, Méhémet-Ali got into a great rage, and swore that

he would bury alive the clumsy lubber who would allow to perish the object of his sudden predilection. The following day the dahlia, carefully deposited in a box, was transferred to the shade of the sycamore, but the fading flower bent mournfully its head. The gardener was led up, stretched on the ground, and in spite of his wailing, received immediately several lashes of the courbache. As he never ceased, however, to repeat that plants could not be made to obey like men, Méhémet-Ali ended by being moved, and stopped the bastinado; he sent even the next day a little present to his victim to compensate him for his sufferings. Méhémet-Ali took the same course in everything, as in this significant adventure. He would order the day before, for the next, a great reform, without troubling himself much to know if it were possible to execute it. It was thus when he wished to change the old method of accounts of the Copts, and establish instead French accounts; he sent suddenly instructions into the provinces. The tax-collectors who did not submit to them, through ignorance rather than ill-will, suffered the fate of the poor gardener charged to take care of the dahlia. The legendary story asserts even, that the native clerks were obliged to learn in a very short time the new methods; this time expired, all those who did not know them perfectly were hanged over their books. Therefore the work of Méhémet-Ali, which might have been of admirable fecundity, almost

entirely disappeared when he was no longer there to sustain it with his iron hand. Profound traces of it are still constantly found ; the foundations and main walls of the edifice still subsist ; but the Arabs and the Copts, prompted by their special instincts, have covered them with arabesques, under which it is almost no longer possible to distinguish them. The successors of Méhémet-Ali have acted like him, but with much less genius. They desired to create suddenly, institutions contrary to the habits of the country, and which it would have been necessary to implant very slowly in the Egyptian soil, to render them durable. That is the reason why Egypt, hardly born to modern life, is already covered with administrative and political ruins, and it presents, in what might be a fresh youth, the appearance of the most complete decrepitude.

Another disadvantage of the system inaugurated by Méhémet-Ali and continued by his successors, is too obvious at present, that any one should think of disputing it. It is known that Amru, on arriving in Egypt, had written to Omar that the first condition for assuring the prosperity of the country and the happiness of its children was, "to adopt no project tending to augment the taxes." Excellent counsel, but which, alas ! was to be little followed. Abd-Allah, named governor of Egypt in the place of Amru, hastened to raise taxes, that his predecessor, faithful to his own declaration, had left at the level he had found them

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at the moment of his conquest. One day, Othman, charmed with the immediate results of this measure, said to Amru: "Abd-Allah knew well how to milk the udder, after you." "That is true," replied Amru, "but then he has starved the young." To its misfortune, Egypt has been much oftener governed by men like Abd-Allah, than Amru; therefore, in spite of its wonderful riches, it has been impoverished many times. It is running at present one of those epochs when, through milking the udder, the young are famishing.

It is to be hoped that those who are to be charged with its destinies, will remember another legendary story, not less worthy of being noticed than that of Amru. The first act of Ahmed-Ebn-Touloun, when he had united in his hands all the civil and military power, was to abolish the taxes and the odious vexations that had drawn on his predecessors the hatred of the people; he gave the order to suppress the vexatious taxes and the violent proceedings with which their collection was accompanied in the provinces. This diminution amounted, from the first year, to a sum of about 100,000 dynars, or £60,000 sterling. As it might have been expected, the persons around Ahmed-Ebn-Touloun spared no effort to turn him from his generous designs, but it was in vain. If we may believe Arabian historians, men whose testimony is certainly worthy of respect, he was confirmed in his resolution by a dream, in

which he believed he saw one of the pious friends of his youth, who said to him: "When a prince abandons his rights for the good of his people; God himself undertakes his reward." These same historians add that, having set out the following day for Upper Egypt, Ahmed was crossing the desert, when a hole formed itself suddenly under the steps of a horse that was ridden by one of his suite. The horse stumbled and fell. Ahmed, astonished, examined the opening that had just been made, and found there a million of dynars, about £600,000 sterling. Thus Heaven, by a just reward, sent him tenfold the value of the sum he had renounced, in order to relieve his people. Some time after, Ahmed made a discovery not less considerable, on the most elevated ridge of Mount Mokatam, in a place where Judah, one of the sons of Jacob, perceiving a great fire on his departure from Egypt, had remained a long time, whilst his brothers returned to their father.

The old stories have a profound signification, and the moral of them is not difficult to discover; the treasure of Ahmed-Ebn-Touloun was not found under the steps of a horse; but the prosperity of Egypt increased a hundred-fold by wise reforms and judicious economy, has long remunerated the founder of the dynasty of the Toulonides for the sacrifices he had made for the good of the country. Egypt is governed at present by a sove-

reign as religious as Ahmed-Ebn-Touloun. May he have dreams as prolific as his ! May some new saint come and whisper into his ear : "When a prince abandons his rights for the good of his people, God himself undertakes his reward."

## CHAPTER XXII.

### THE EUROPEANS.

IF one desires to find at present the ruling class in Egypt, he must not look for it, as we have said, among the Turks nor among the Arabs. Egypt is, in fact, a Mussulman people governed by Christian colonies. It has not always been thus. In the last century, the condition of Europeans living in Cairo and Alexandria was that of foreigners encamped in an enemy's country, where they were in constant danger of finding themselves pillaged, laid under contribution, and even massacred. They were enclosed in special districts, which the police carefully closed every night, and from which they could not go out, after a certain hour, without running the greatest risks. Volney, who visited the country about 1784, has left us a picture of their mode of life worth reproducing. He says, " Their situation is nearly that of the Dutch at Nangasaki, that is to say, that, shut-in in a kind of great blind-alley, they live with one another without much communication with the outer world ; they fear it even, and go out as little as possible, so as not to expose themselves to



the insults of the people, who hate the name of France, or the assaults of the Mamelukes, who force them in the streets to dismount from their asses. In this kind of habitual confinement they tremble every moment lest the plague oblige them to shut themselves up in their houses, or some riot expose their quarter to pillage, or the commander make some pecuniary demand, or, finally, the beys force them to share in something always dangerous. Their affairs give them not less trouble. Obligated to sell on credit, they are rarely paid on the terms agreed. The bills of exchange even have no regulation, no recourse at law, because courts of law are a greater evil than bankruptcy; everything is disposed of according to conscience, and this conscience has been changing for some time more and more; payments due to them are deferred for whole years; sometimes they are not made at all; almost always they are swindled. One, moreover, can never realize properties, because one can only get in his debts by giving fresh credit for more considerable sums."

One would fancy he was dreaming now on reading such details. Not only the blind-alley, wherein the Christians were shut up at the time of Volney, enclosed in by a riot or a plague, exists no longer, but the Arab towns disappear gradually under the European quarters that invade them; not only are the foreigners no longer exposed to demands of money from the commander, but they pay no taxes,

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whilst enjoying more than anybody the public services ; not only the brutal Mamelukes no longer oblige them to dismount from their donkeys, but it is they who, in their splendid carriages, splash with mud the Mussulmans ; not only do they possess Courts of Justice for themselves, but, as the natives have none on their part, nothing is easier for the former than to give themselves up to unbridled usury ; not only are they no longer slaves unceasingly threatened in their fortunes and their lives, but they are even the sovereign and greedy masters, against whom there are no means of resistance, and whose excesses the most reprehensible must be accepted without a murmur. The exceptions are numerous beyond all doubt ; but generally, the European who comes to Egypt does not think of establishing his family there, and of implanting it there for several generations ; his object is to make a rapid fortune that he may go and enjoy it as soon as possible in Europe. He would content himself with more modest gains if his children were to augment later his fortune and build on the foundation that he would have slowly laid down. He must have excessive profits in order to reap and get in as quickly as possible considerable sums, and prepare himself thus for a long repose and a luxurious life in his own country. It is necessary, moreover, to have a morality proof against the rudest assaults to resist the temptation to profit by the innumerable advantages and exorbitant privileges that the European enjoys in

Egypt. Now, human nature is everywhere the same, and when it is not restrained by any law, we must not be astonished if it deviates widely from the straight path. Since Méhémet-Ali opened the door to foreigners, the régime of oppression as described by Volney has entirely disappeared. But with the odious régime, and which threatened to become intolerable, corresponded a series of guarantees exacted by the governments to protect as much as possible the security of their native-born subjects. The régime has disappeared, the guarantees remain. What was formerly an arm against tyranny has become an instrument of tyranny ; in obtaining the most complete liberty the Europeans have preserved all the privileges which they enjoyed at the time of the conditions. What was to secure them from being imposed upon gave them the power to impose upon others in their turn. A just retribution perhaps for affairs here below ; a just chastisement of the old Egyptian barbarity, but an incessant cause of the most violent abuses.

The progress that the Europeans have made until now in Egypt may be divided into three periods. The first period, that of Méhémet-Ali, has presented but few disadvantages. In making use almost exclusively of Europeans, Méhémet-Ali knew how to confine them within the reasonable limits of an independence, fruitful for them, and in no wise prejudicial to the natives. It is under Saïd Pacha that the second period, that, when the European emancipated became

domineering, has produced its most unfavourable effects. A sovereign lively and compliant and easily conciliated in everything by a witticism, Saïd Pacha suffered himself to be imposed upon without obstacle by the Europeans of every shade that pressed around him. The stories, the most improbable, of M. About, in his discerning and charming tale of the *Fellah*, are but a faint reproduction of the reality. Must it be confessed? The Consuls, whose office it should have been to restrain the covetousness of their fellow-countrymen, were the first to avail themselves of their diplomatic privileges to extort from the liberality of Saïd Pacha the most considerable presents. The clever stroke of one of them, who one day spoke to the Viceroy as follows, is well known : "Your Highness knows that Méhémet-Ali had promised to give me certain lands. I depended on it. If I had them I should have undertaken such and such enterprises ; they would have given me twelve millions. You cannot set aside the promises of Méhémet-Ali ; it is, then, twelve millions that you owe me." On this strange argument Saïd Pacha grinned and paid. Another consul had been charged to procure for the Viceroy a service of Sèvres porcelain. When the service arrived, the obliging Consul declared that there was nothing finer in all France, that sovereigns only could obtain any similar, but that the price equalled the merit of it, and that it cost five hundred thousand francs. At first incredulous, Saïd ended by

suffering himself to be convinced. He paid for it, but on looking more attentively at his service, he discovered between two plates a detailed invoice from the manufactory of Sèvres, which barely amounted to fifty thousand francs. Delighted with what he had found, he ordered a grand dinner, in which was to figure the Consul who had just swindled him so shamefully. At the dessert he had the service of Sèvres brought in under the pretext of submitting it to the admiration of his guests. But on passing two plates to the Consul, he managed purposely to let them fall, so that the invoice which had been inserted between them fluttered on to the floor. At this sight the Consul turned pale, and Saïd Pacha burst out laughing. He carefully picked up the invoice, read it, and read it again out loud feigning surprise, and passed it round, but, as the delinquent made too pitiful a countenance amid the general hilarity: "After all," said he, laughing more than anyone else, "there is nothing to be vexed at; you have simply added a cipher."

What contributed to multiply scenes of this kind was that the Consuls-General, as well as the simple Consuls and the Consular agents, did not hesitate at this time to do commercial business openly. That produced sometimes singular complications of professions and nationalities. A Greek by birth, and French protégé, M. Zizinia was at the same time Consul-General for Belgium and impressario of the Italian

Theatre of Alexandria, which still bears his name. As a French protégé, he could only present claims for his own account through the agency of the Consul of France, and nothing could have prevented the latter from expelling him from Egypt, in spite of his title of Belgian Consul, if he had taken it into his head to do so. I state with pleasure that the Consular morals are profoundly modified since Saïd Pacha. The Consuls-General trade no longer ; they leave this business to the ordinary Consuls and Consular agents, who, unfortunately, have often kept up the old habit. But if the Consuls-General have become real diplomatists, they have not ceased to be despots on a small scale. Surrounded by their cawas, who enjoy like them absolute immunities, they recognize no other laws than those they have made. One could hardly believe the importance of these cawas, about whom circulate in Cairo and Alexandria the most extraordinary stories. These superior beings are accountable only to God and to their Consuls. The local police would never dare to arrest them, even when they commit the most obvious offences. Everything that affects intimately or remotely the Consuls enjoys the same privileges. I have related elsewhere the great diplomatic incident stirred-up last year by the French Consul-General with regard to a native of Barbary who served him as a scullion. This Berber, who resembled all other Berbers, and bore no mark whatever on his person of the diplomatic inviolability with which he was, it appears,

invested, had been found in a bad locality, where he had been occupied in violently beating a woman. He was, moreover, in a state of complete drunkenness, and when he was arrested to be conducted to the station, it was impossible for him to utter a word the least intelligible. Not till the following morning had he found sufficient presence of mind to say that he belonged to the Consular body, occupying the position . . . . of a scullion! He was immediately released with great marks of respect; but the rights of France had nevertheless been violated! The Capitulations cried vengeance! The French Consul-General was not a man to leave unpunished so scandalous an act of Oriental barbarity, After having stirred up the whole of Cairo with this quarrel, he exacted from the Egyptian Government a remarkable reparation. Would it be believed? The Prefect of the police of Cairo was obliged to present himself at the French Consulate in order to declare in the name of the Khedive to the Consular scullion that Egypt bitterly regretted the insult done in his person to the honour and privileges of France!

When the Consuls act in this way, how can we wonder at the conduct of simple Europeans? I remember the impression of profound astonishment I experienced on my arrival at Cairo at the sight of a young man who was throwing great stones at the swans swimming on the pond of the Esbekieh gardens. Two policemen were looking at him doing it without

stirring a foot. I ended by approaching them and saying, "Why, then, don't you prevent that young man from hurting those swans?" "He is a European!" they replied. He is a European! This word is an answer to every complaint. The European is amenable only to the jurisdiction of his Consul, and at present to that of the reformed tribunals. How far we are from the time when the first comer used to pull him off his donkey! His turn is come to knock down the other with impunity. One finds at every step in the streets of Cairo immense heaps of stones that obstruct completely the circulation; they belong to Europeans who are getting their houses repaired. The police have no right to remove them. They can only ask the Consuls to give the order for it, and these take care not to disturb their fellow-countrymen for such trifles. The caprice of a single man therefore forces the whole population to abandon for weeks together the use of a street. I admired at one of my friends, who inhabited a very fine house, a splendid poultry-yard. "Do you know how it has been made?" said he. "The former proprietor, a Frenchman, very clever, taking it into his head one day that he had no poultry-yard, blockaded the street on one side next his house; the passers-by went around; a short time afterwards he erected another barrier at a short distance; then he built up great walls in the place of the barriers. His poultry-yard was finished! As for the street, the house of a native was demolished to



join the two ends ; and through a slight turn everything was as well as formerly." The Frenchman had his poultry-yard and the native no longer a house. Everything was in order ! We must not imagine that the natives are, in fact, in their own houses in Egypt : it is the Europeans who are the real proprietors of the country ; the Turks and the Arabs live there only on sufferance. It is well-known that, in the towns foreigners pay no taxes, and they who inhabit houses of the natives often refuse in the bargain to pay their rent. There are no means of ejecting them from a dwelling that pleases them, and when their lease has expired. Recourse to the Consuls leads to endless complications, and never produces a satisfactory result.

Far from restraining the European power, which had developed so largely under Saïd Pacha, Ismail Pacha gave it immense extension in a new way, the first effects of which have been disastrous. I will speak of the innumerable European employés with whom he filled the offices of the civil service. But among the men that an adventurous spirit, and sometimes the impossibility to remain honourably in Europe, led into Egypt, flattery, the love of intrigue, a taste for the most scandalous speculations, have almost always prevailed over real merit. There have been exceptions and even brilliant exceptions, but they have only confirmed the general rule. Ismail Pacha was not very lucky in choosing men. They

who were around him have done more harm than he to Egypt. It is they who edged on the unhappy Khedive to commit the greatest follies, and, in the *coup d'état* which led to his fall, the ranks of the party self-styled *national*, to whom he pretended to yield in repelling the European governments, were filled with Europeans, moved by the sole desire of obtaining further benefits from a régime of profitable dilapidations. To tell the truth, it must be admitted, moreover, that when Europe has interfered to indicate directly the officials to Ismaïl Pacha, she has not always made a better choice than his own. The new comers, doubtlessly, do not resemble the old employés with regard to moral indelicacy, and there have been very few who have strained it to abuse in the hope of profiting by it. But how many were there suitable to the mission they came to fulfil? A very small number certainly. The governments who sent them to Egypt troubled themselves very little to ascertain if they were prepared for the work they confided to them. It was often awarded as a recompense for a life of meritorious services, and it was not unusual to see an old man arriving at Cairo to accomplish a reform that would have demanded the activity of youth and health; at other times, it was a consumptive person who solicited to be sent to Cairo, and obtained his object in the hope that the climate would suit his lungs. Besides, in bad or in good health, hardly any of them knew Arabic, hardly any were conversant

with Egyptian affairs, and every one of them required several years to prepare himself to fulfil his duties. I remember with what animation, with what sound sense and straightforwardness, a judge of the reformed tribunals explained in my presence the reasons which, according to him, directed the governments in the choice of Egyptian officials. "As for me," said he, "I was a general—a general unattached; they owed me a military command, and they made me a judge." And his daughter, who joined in the conversation, interrupted to say: "I must tell you that my father was a much better general than a judge." That was saying a great deal, for, by a singular chance, this general, changed suddenly into a judge, turned out to be one of the best magistrates of the reformed tribunals. That did not prevent him from appreciating with a perfect independence of mind the proceedings to which he owed his nomination. Speaking to one of his colleagues of another nationality, who passed with good reason for an emeritus jurisconsult: "Are they fools in your country?" said he, with lively irony, "to send into Egypt what they have of the best in their judicial staff? Would they not do better to keep their jurisconsults for themselves, and, after the example of my country, pour into the Egyptian tribunals the excess of their army?" It is especially among the English officials that personal conveniences have often replaced aptitudes. Egypt being placed half way to India, they get made there a kind of

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halting-place for the officials, who would run the risk of being fatigued by a too sudden return to Europe. Good fathers of families, who have some of their children in England and others in India, apply also for a place at Cairo or Alexandria, to be half way between the two halves of their family. How do the Egyptian affairs accommodate themselves to all that? We begin to find out, and from the excess of evil gradually comes the remedy.

There has been formed now some years at Cairo and Alexandria a little colony of European officials of unquestionable probity and intelligence. By a strange fortune, it is to its financial embarrassments that Egypt will be indebted for having at last a good administration. The commission of the debt nominated at the end of the bankruptcy of 1876 has been the first model of a corps absolutely irreproachable. The governments have made in addition some good selections, which have led since to many others. We may therefore see the moment coming, when the famous administrative reforms, of which so much has been said for a long time, will be at last carried out, and when arbitrariness will disappear, the sole cause of the ruin of Egypt. Then it will be necessary that the Europeans decide to live in this country under reasonable laws, replacing gradually odious privileges. The régime from which they have profited so much is to disappear as completely as the régime from which they suffered so much at the time of Volney. It is a

truth which they do not regard without bitterness, and those who present it to them are always sure to be treated by them with a rage almost furious. What does it matter? Little by little the dream of Ismail Pacha is being realized ; Egypt is breaking loose from Africa to come and join Europe. When the welding is done, it will be highly necessary that the morals change, and that the old types of the official, and of the European colonist, give place in the valley of the Nile to new types.

## CHAPTER XXIII.

### THE SCHOOLS.

THE school in Egypt, as in all the oriental world, plays a decisive rôle ; it is by the school that Mahometanism is preserved and rooted in the mind ; it is equally by the school that the diverse Christian sects maintain their distinct originality, in the midst of the Mussulman world, with which they are, as it were, overwhelmed. Each nationality has its schools in Egypt : Copts, Arabs, Israelites, English, French, Italians, Greeks, etc. All the races distributed along the Nile, seek in instruction a means, at first, of keeping themselves intact, then, of developing themselves at their neighbour's expense. It would be far too long to go through, were it even only hurriedly, the principal establishments of instruction that exist at Cairo, Alexandria, Port Said, Syout, etc. Of all the Christian schools I have visited—and I have visited many—that which has struck me most is the Greek school for girls at Cairo. The Greeks are very numerous in Egypt ; their colony is one of the most important, active, and stirring in the country ; they exercise

there every trade, and their faults are too well known to require pointing out. But whatever may be the opinion about them, one pardons everything as soon as he enters into their schools. We must render justice to the Greeks; they have an admirable patriotism, and this patriotism is highly intelligent. As an establishment, the school for Greek girls of Cairo is beyond the average; as a system of instruction, it presents the most perfect model one can propose, if not to pedagogues, at least to patriots. The first class I visited, was that of great girls, from twelve to fifteen: their walls were papered with tables, where the principal rules of the grammar, of moral philosophy and arithmetic, were developed in the language and with the alphabetic characters of Homer and Xenophon. In the middle of the hall, a group of girls, of a remarkable type, among whom might be seen a few of finished beauty, were singing, in concert, national songs, that their professor accompanied on the pianoforte. These solemn and powerful songs, and sweet and pure voices—these black eyes of remarkable brilliancy and profiles of antique cameos, produced a charming effect. I was much more moved, however, by the class of very little girls. There, the walls were ornamented with coloured pictures, representing scenes from the Bible, with sentences in vulgar Greek. The little girls were numerous. In order to give me an idea of their exercises, a brunette of hardly eight years, whose

eyes flashed lightning, got up on a chair, whilst her companions surrounded her, in forming a pretty ring. The little girl perched on the chair represented a nightingale, to which the ring of the little girls were making, in a song of a charming rhythm, the most alluring proposals : " Let thyself be put into a cage," they were saying, " we will offer thee beautiful, clear water, delicious cakes, some nice sugar. Thou wilt not have to fear the stifling heat of the day nor the dangerous chilliness of the night. Thou shalt be petted, loved, doted on ; nothing shalt thou want ; thy least wishes shall be anticipated by our attentive cares, and thou wilt be able to continue warbling without danger and without care, thy joyous refrains." It should have been seen with what a tone, or rather with what spirit, the pretty nightingale repelled these deceptive promises. The little girl spread out her arms and moved her fingers in imitating the flapping of the wings of a bird that flies away. Then in a voice softer than the flight of a nightingale, she replied : " No ! no ! no ! I know what your perfidious gifts are worth. I let myself be caught by them, and then I am lost. Nothing is better than the free air for the bird ; nothing in the world is better than independence for everybody, even with work, even with misery, even with hunger and thirst. Woe ! woe ! to those who let themselves be caught by the gilded snares of servitude ! " I am a philhellene only with reserve, and yet the scene that was played before



me with remarkable accent and gracefulness by the little girls of the Greek school of Cairo, moved me deeply. It should have been seen what rapid movement, that which represented the independent bird, agitated the little fingers to fly away far from despotism ! Her pantomime was astonishing for its naturalness and vivacity, especially on the part of a child so young. Admirable facility of that unique race, which, after so many historical adventures, so many trials whercon it has stamped its virtue, finds still the brilliant qualities, the generous illusions, the ardent ambitions, with which it has dazzled the world !

But the Arab schools, that are met with everywhere in Egypt, are more interesting than the foreign schools. From its earliest years, Mahometanism has favoured the development of primary instruction. Little favourable to high learning, since it reduces it to the knowledge of a book, with the letter of which it was pre-occupied much more than with its spirit ; opposing early insuperable barriers to any liberal culture, no religion has exacted more definitely from its adepts the elementary practice of reading and writing. Every good Mussulman ought to know the Koran ; and to know it well, he must be capable of copying it. " Learn to write well," said already the Caliph Ali, " good writing is one of the keys to riches." It did not mean terrestrial riches, but those that empowered to buy heaven. Therefore

the first centuries of Islamism saw the creation of innumerable schools, where the grammatical, literary, and moral study of the Koran was widely extended. In truth, this study was soon congealed in an unalterable mould ; but that has not hindered it from gaining in extent what it has lost in depth. Generally all the faithful, who devote a part of their fortune to the elevation of a mosque, take great care that this mosque contains a fountain and a school.

By a kind of objective and subsisting metaphor, the fountains and the schools are confounded in the same buildings : the body and mind may come and drink at the same source. At Cairo particularly, there is not, perhaps, a single fountain that has not annexed to it a school ; and at Cairo, it is well known, fountains are everywhere. Almost all are nice buildings, and the greater part of them are exquisite, and are models of gracefulness, lightness, and ornamentation. After the mosques, there is no work of art in which the genius of the Arabian architects has been exercised in caprices more varied and more delicate. Imagine a rotunda, sustained by twisted columns of great elegance, surmounted by a pent-house, sculptured and painted with great prodigality of decoration. As you approach, you perceive through windows of a charming quaintness, a tub filled with water, and shells like those of the Wallace fountains suspended at the ends of long chains, riveted to the wall : generally, an attendant at the fountain holds out to

you one of these shell cups to quench your thirst, if so disposed. But while you drink or merely watch the drinkers, an incessant murmur, a kind of monotonous humming, falls on the ear: it is the school of the fountain where hundreds of children are chanting verses of the Koran. I cannot adequately describe the spectacle, full of movement, colour, and noise, which these schools present. All the pupils are squatting down in the Arab manner, and are swinging their bodies whilst reciting the holy book. These ranks of little round heads, some freshly shaved, others covered with short hair, above which rises the central lock, which the barber has carefully avoided cutting; others again, in white or red caps, moving all together in cadence in a kind of light and shade, that one seeks everywhere in Egypt, because it is an indication of coolness; those hundreds of open mouths from which is escaping the same refrain; and the master or *fakir* in the centre, armed sometimes with a long stick, which he uses on the heads of inattentive pupils, but which resembles the bâton of a chef d'orchestre ruling that strange harmony;—altogether present, certainly to European eyes and ears, one of the most original scenes of Oriental manners. Many reasons have been sought to explain the swinging in cadence that accompanies, not only at the primary schools, but everywhere, the recitation of the Koran. Some have maintained that this custom was established in consequence of the obligation imposed on

Mussulmans to bow every time they mention the name of God ; and for fear of committing an involuntary omission, they have adopted the custom of bowing incessantly on reading the Koran. Others think that this movement is necessary to keep the mind and body awake, especially on account of the squatting posture so affected by the Orientals. This last hypothesis seems the better. That it is good for the Arabs, it is possible ; but Europeans, who would rock themselves thus in a way slow and regular, would, on the contrary, not be long in getting very drowsy in body and mind.

Every good Mahometan is obliged to learn the Koran ; consequently, there is no village so poor or so sordid, that has not its primary school. It would therefore seem natural to believe that this necessity for every one of the faithful to know how to read and write, would produce among the Mussulman nations the same effect as that produced among the Protestant nations from the universal obligation to know the Bible. As soon as the instrument of all instruction, that is to say, reading and writing, is, through religious motives, put into the hands of the people, why not make use of it in a scientific interest ? Unfortunately, there are essential differences between the language of the Koran, which is the literary language, and the vulgar tongue. The work of children in the primary schools is nearly lost for the uses of life. The mechanical way in which the Koran is

learnt, stifles, moreover, any initiative of the mind ; it ties up in some way instead of opening the intelligence. The fakirs, or masters, are too ignorant to teach their pupils anything else than the verses of the holy book. The most elementary notions of history, geography, arithmetic, are absolutely foreign to them. They are not, properly speaking, tutors ; they are religious personages, whose principal mission consists in reading the Koran over the tombs, or in private houses on the occasion of ceremonies, which, like circumcision, marriage, interment, should be accompanied by the recitation of a few passages from Mahomet. That is their principal source of income. They direct in the bargain, the primary school, which brings them hardly any other profit than the title of *m'aalim* or *aalim*, which involves specially the idea of learned or literary man, the plural of which, *oulemas*, has passed into European languages. They barely receive from the parents of their pupils, even any slight remuneration, at the time when the latter arrive at a complete knowledge of the Koran. Sometimes also, on the occasion of the fête of the Ramadan, or some other Mussulman fête, the administration of the *wakfs* distributes to them a *tarbouche*, an *immeh*—a band of muslin with which a turban is formed,—a pair of *papooches*, a piece of cotton cloth for an *iri*,—a kind of blouse, blue, black, or white, with large sleeves. It is not to be wondered at, if masters so poorly paid are needy people, clandestine beggars. The following is

an example of the little prayers in vogue in the Arab schools, and which serve to celebrate the moment when the child has arrived at the end of his studies ; it shows with what complete absence of reserve the fakirs solicit from the fathers of families, offerings of presents rather rarely obtained :

“ Praise to God, Master of the Universe, to Him who pardons and preserves ! He knows the past and the future, and wraps up events in obscurity. He knows the course of the black ants, and their work when they watch in the dark. He has created and raised the vault of the heavens—He has extended the land beyond the salt sea. May He give to this child happiness and long life—that he may read attentively the Koran, and the history of ancient and modern times. This child has learnt to read and write, to speak and count with ability ; let his father be not miserly, and reward him with gold and silver. Oh my father, thou hast well paid me for what I have learnt ; may God give thee a place in Paradise ! And thou, my mother, receive my thanks—for thy cares morning and evening,—God desires that I see thee seated in Paradise, and saluted by Mariam, Zenab, and Fatima ! Our fakir has taught us our A B C,—let him be praised with gratitude ! Our fakir has taught us as far as ‘ the great tidings ’ (chap. lxxviii.)\*—may he never lose the benediction ! Our fakir has taught us as far as ‘ the Empire ’ (chap. lxvii.)—may his name be blessed ! Our fakir has taught us as far as ‘ Merciful ’ (chap. xv.)—may he receive his just reward ! Our fakir has taught us as far as ‘ Ya Sin ’ (chap. xxxvi.)†—may his days and his years be always serene. Our fakir has taught us as far as ‘ the tavern ’ (chap.

\* All these passages between inverted commas indicate the beginning of chapters of the Koran.

† Two letters, the meaning of which is unknown ; the chapter of which they form the title is used as a mortuary prayer.

xii.)—may the blessings of Providence be always on him ! Our fakir has taught us as far as ‘Cattle’ (chap. vi.)—may he never be exposed to bad words ! Our fakir has taught us as far as ‘the Cow’ (chap. ii.)—may he always be honoured in future as now ! Our fakir has well deserved from us—a green coat and besides a turban. Oh, young girls all around us, I commend you to God for your black painted eyes, and for your mirrors ! Oh, you married women assembled here, I pray by the chapter of the ‘Orders’ (chap. xxxvii.) that you may be protected ! Oh, old women, all around us, you ought to be beaten with old shoes and driven out ! But to all women, one should rather say : Take the basin and the pitcher and wash thyself and pray.”

It will be seen, no doubt, that if this strange prayer teaches superabundantly to children, gratitude to their masters, and in a sufficient degree, though more restricted, gratitude to their father and mother, it inculcates in them, in return, principles of a singular gallantry and habits not very respectful towards old age. That is a trait of manners very curious and which is not isolated. Here, for example, is the end of another prayer of the same kind, wherein the merits of the teaching of the fakir are exposed not less emphatically. We pass over the praises of doubtful propriety in order to arrive directly at the conclusion :—

“ May pardon, O God, be the reward of our fakir, as well as of our parents and all those who love them ! O God of mercy, be merciful unto them ! I pray thee, O master of all the people, preserve our fakir from all evil, and our arif (monitor, under-master) the same ! O God, ameliorate his position and shower on him thy benefits ! But his old wife, in my opinion,

is full of deceit, she is capable of stealing the hens from the way-side. If you believe me, put the old woman into the hot bath and feed her with stripes of the palm sticks. But you, O women, who are objects of love, let the kohl and the musk be presents to you ; and you, young girls, your saliva is like sugar-candy. I have kept you by the sourate of the Saffat (chap. xxxviii). But must I change my opinion and pardon the old women, since pardon is required and recommended by the law? Let it not be my fault to neglect it. Give to the old woman the basin and the pitcher, and let her make her ablutions. As for the father of the circumcised, O God, preserve him to us, as well as the circumcised himself! Prolong his life! And his mother . . . O God, render her happy ; scatter thy blessings on her, O merciful God !”

Let the old women escape as well as they can from the grasp of Arab scholars! We would rather hear these threats of punishment hurled against them, since they always end, moreover, in their running away from them by means of a few ablutions, than the schools of Egypt resounding, as many travellers have alleged, with the most violent appeals to Musulman fanaticism against the Christians. It has often been related that the daily prayer of the pupils invoked all the maledictions of Allah on those who refused to accept the religion of Mahomet. Nothing is less true. But the following passage extracted from a diffuse prayer, full of repetitions and nonsense, may be considered as not very charitable towards the “unbelieving :”

“O God ! preserve and glorify Islamism, give victory to the word of faith and truth and duration to the reign of thy ser-



vant, who is submissive to thy greatness and thy glory, and whom we are obliged to obey ; to him who is called the Sultan Abdul-Hamid, may God give him the victory, and cause to perish by his sword the infidels, our enemies."

Nothing is more inoffensive than this indirect appeal to the rusty sword of Abdul-Hamid. No more intolerance is found in the school than elsewhere in Egypt. Hatred to the Christian bursts out nowhere there. It is not then as a religious institution that the Arab primary school is baleful, it is as a pedagogic institution. In crushing the memory of the child under the weight of verses from the Koran ; in forcing him during all his youth to recite, word for word, a book written in a language different from his own common tongue ; in not developing, on the other hand, any of his intellectual faculties, thereby habituating him to that dangerous abasement, that ends in becoming the essence of his nature. Beyond the Koran, the letter and not the spirit of which usurps all his intelligence, he knows nothing of life, nothing of general knowledge, nothing of the past nor of the present : therefore, he is condemned to a moral somnolency, to a fatalistic resignation to events, against which no protestation arises in his torpid soul. Hence the slavishness of the fellah, and his incapacity to undertake the least struggle against things and men that crush him. If he never seeks to resist them, it is because at the primary school, he is never taught to say,

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like the little Greek girl in waving her arms to  
repel the imaginary yoke that would enthrall  
her: "Nothing is better than the free air for  
the bird; nothing is better for everybody than  
liberty."

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## CHAPTER XXIV.

### THE MOSQUE OF EL-AZHAR.\*

YOU should not leave Cairo without having seen the mosque of El-Azhar "the flowery," or "the flourishing." El-Azhar is the grand Mussulman university of the East. Whilst the celebrated universities of Damascus, Bagdad, and Bessora, became extinct through the decadence of Arabian intellectual life, it alone subsisted, preserving in the midst of the modern world, as in a citadel hitherto impregnable, the traditions intact of Islam. It is known that the sanguinary insurrection the French conquest had provoked at Cairo, suppressed in all other parts of the city, found in the mosque of El-Azhar a last refuge, where it still long resisted the cannons of Bonaparte, and where the intervention of Heaven, manifested by a violent storm, alone could crush it entirely. Like the cannon balls of Bonaparte, contemporary ideas, the principles of European civilization, fell impotently

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\* I have borrowed the principal details contained in this chapter from the able work of Dor Bey, on Public Instruction in Egypt.

against the walls of El-Azhar, without making a breach there, without succeeding in overthrowing the invincible ramparts, behind which had taken refuge this last relic of the Middle Ages. More than nine thousand students frequent it still with veneration, although the instruction given there has hardly varied since the month of Gémasi-el-aoual of the year 359 of the Hegira (970), the epoch when it was founded by the Fatimarte General Gauhar. A strange odour of decay penetrates you as soon as you get over the threshold; you feel that you are going up the stream of centuries, that you are carried back to the sources of Islamism, and are going to live for a few hours in a past everywhere else vanished.

It is by the great western doorway that you must enter into the mosque of El-Azhar. You pass at first a long vaulted passage which is occupied by an assemblage of dealers of all sorts, sellers of vegetables, fruit, beans dressed in oil. Along the walls barbers exercise their trade; the bare skulls of the Maugrébins and Berbers are disappearing under the snowy lather of soap. This first glance is already very original. But as soon as you penetrate into the great court, the sight is much stranger, much more varied, and much more picturesque even. A thousand students of all ages and all colours, from the Turk with his broad face and pale complexion, to the Hindoo with tapering features and bronzed by the sun, to the negro as black as ebony, all clad in the most diverse costumes,

are squatting, reclining, or standing in every imaginable posture. Some are sleeping peacefully ; others are learning by heart a few passages from the Koran whilst swinging themselves on their hips ; several are sewing or knitting ; many are listening to recitals or stories ; a few, quite out of breath, are holding forth in the midst of a group conspicuous for meridional vivacity ; and then again, a great many are otherwise occupied in taking their meal together. Dealers in water, lemonade, tiny round loaves of bread, are moving about among the crowd with their monotonous cry : "*Sébil Allah ia hatchân !*" "God's water for thee who art thirsty !" After having passed through this court, you enter under an exterior gallery that is used as a primary school. There, hundreds of children, gathered into a stinted space, are noisily learning the Koran close by the spot where young men and white-bearded old men are poring over the commentaries of the law and the traditional rules. The mosque properly called is separated from this primary school by a row of pillars only. It is composed of a great hall, very low, forming a long parallelogram of upwards of three thousand square yards, where the eye distinguishes at first but a complete forest of marble columns, that have been carried off from antique monuments, and whose capitals, of diverse orders, but almost all of rare elegance, are worn away at the angles by the hand of time. Unfortunately, the ceiling is so little elevated that the air and light cannot freely

circulate in this immense gallery. The walls are everywhere lined, where doors and windows admit of it, with coarse, shapeless boxes that contain the students' clothing. The students crowd round their professors in compact masses. At the foot of each pillar, upon a straw mat that covers the stone pavement, or upon some sheepskin, the sheiks are seated. Circles more or less considerable, according to the renown of each, surround them. The students assume the attitude that suits them : they squat in the Arab way, lie down at full length, or in lightly resting on an elbow in the most varied postures ; but they all seem attentive and meditative, and sometimes their faces beam with admiration, showing how much they are devoted to what falls from the lips of their masters, and with what fidelity of memory they garner up their instruction.

The organization of the mosque of El-Azhar calls to mind very faithfully that of our Universities of the Middle Ages, with this sole difference, that the students of the Middle Ages seldom came to the University except to follow there courses of lectures, whilst the students of El-Azhar hardly ever quit the mosque. During the hot summer nights, they sleep stretched out on the pavement of the great court, packed in close together, and lightly wrapped in their cotton robes. In winter, they retire into the interior of the mosque, which serves them as a dormitory, after having served them as a class-room. I remarked

that their clothes were deposited in coarse boxes in rows against the walls, and that dealers in eatables were always there ready to offer them the articles necessary to their frugal diet. Coffee and tobacco only are forbidden at El-Azhar. The rich students prefer lodging round the mosque in the *okkels* and caravansaries that overrun this "Latin quarter" of a kind quite peculiar. But the others live at El-Azhar; they pay nothing there for living and instruction; they are, on the contrary, maintained at the expense of the administration of the *wakfs*, who cause food to be distributed to them regularly. It is especially to facilitate these distributions that the students are portioned out into *riwaks*, or halls, and *harahs*, or quarters, corresponding to their respective countries, according to the system of distinct nations, such as prevailed in the French universities in the Middle Ages, and such as still subsists in certain German universities. Each *riwak* has its sheik, chosen by the Sheik El-Azhar, the head of the mosque and the highest religious authority in Egypt, a definite number of *ferrachtn* or servants, and besides a score of barbers. This administration, composed of many, but very simple, amply suffices for the material organization of an army of students, where, through a sentiment of religious respect with which everyone is animated, discipline is maintained without any trouble. The *riwaks* are thirty-one in number, and the *harahs* twelve. It suffices to look over the list to understand

how far extends the prestige of El-Azhar. As well as the Turkish, Syrian, Egyptian, Algerian, Tunisian, Morocco, *riwaks*, there are also there *riwaks* of Central Africa, and particularly from Bournou, Bagdad, Mesopotamia, India, Kurdistan, Darfour, Souakin, Sennaar, Java, and the holy cities of Mecca and Medina, etc. The professors, divided into five classes, amount to three hundred and fourteen, and belong to the four orthodox rites of Islamism. They are not regularly paid, but they receive voluntary contributions and gifts of all sorts. Many besides, through their reputation for knowledge and virtue, are appointed as preachers in the other mosques, or as professors in the superior schools of the Government; and that secures to them resources less precarious than those they derive from El-Azhar.

That which recalls still more the Middle Ages and the German universities than the organization of the students, is the mode of nomination of the professors.

Never perhaps has the famous system of the *privat docenten* flourished with more freedom and extension than at El-Azhar, and in this respect the most brilliant of our faculties might have something to envy of the old Mussulman mosque. The imperfect process of examinations and degrees is replaced there by an admirable competition. When they have attentively followed the lessons of the master, they are accustomed to assemble in groups of intimate friends, in order to repeat in a sort of lecture what



has just been taught to them. The most intelligent explain to the dullest what these have not clearly understood, or not understood at all; and it often happens, in these exercises of the pupils, that one of these self-constituted masters perceives all at once his aptitude for the vocation of professor. He does not avow immediately his secret ambition, but he continues developing the teaching of the master before his comrades until these, struck with the elegance of his speech, or the truth of his doctrine, say to him themselves: "But why don't you then become yourself a master also?" As soon as this encouragement is given, the aspirant to the professorship goes and takes his place against a column of the mosque to go through his apprenticeship, and tries to unite around him numerous auditors: neither the sheiks nor the ulemas try to stop him; they trust to the common judgment, to time and experience, fully assured that, if the young master has no solid merit, and is but the product of a factitious enthusiasm of a coterie, his success will be ephemeral, and that his pretensions will be corrected by a signal failure.

But when it is otherwise, when the ring enlarges around the candidate, when his reputation takes a real consistency, the sheiks, without affectation, without any outward show, mix again and again with the pupils of the new professor; they listen with attention, and as the method of teaching at El-Azhar is by conference, each auditor being at liberty to put questions

to the master, they ask him, as in the case of ordinary students, explanations on doubtful points, and interrogate him on the obscurities of his doctrine. There results from it an oratorical and scientific tilt that decides the fate of the candidate. The audience is the judge; if the young *savant* stops short at the questions of the sheiks, he falls amid the jeers of his comrades; if, on the contrary, he succeeds in solving all the difficulties that are submitted to him, the general acclamation assures and proclaims his triumph: he has no need of any other degree to take rank among the professors of the mosque; he becomes master by right without other ceremony; he is called henceforth sheik, and he enjoys all the privileges of the professorial corps.

How very fruitful similar processes of recruitment for the professors would render the teaching of the mosque of El-Azhar if, by its nature even, it were not condemned to the most complete, the most irremediable sterility! The students possess on their side a liberty that might be wonderfully prolific. No control is exercised over them; they choose as they like the courses they are to follow, and when they have chosen them, no one undertakes to ascertain if they present themselves there regularly or not—no one hinders them from going from one to the other. Everything is left to the initiative of their mind and will. Unfortunately, the plan of studies of El-Azhar is too restricted to be capable of admitting the most super-

ficial notions of modern sciences. It is divided into four principal sections, of which the first two comprise the preparatory studies—the grammar and the syntax. The third degree, named *Aelm-el-Tauhid*, or science of the unity of God, deals with the essential qualities attributed, on the one hand to the Divinity, and on the other to the prophets. The principal qualities inherent in the Divinity are thirteen in number, being, pre-existence, eternity, freedom from chance, autonomy, unity, omnipotence, volition, omniscience, life, hearing, sight, and finally, speech, independent of letters and sounds. The fourth part of the instruction comprises law, strictly speaking, *Aëlm-et-fiq*; it consists solely in the mechanical study of the interminable commentaries on the Koran, that serve as an explanation to the *aïat*, containing the principles of jurisprudence. In general, the basis of all Arabic superior instruction is the exegesis of the Koran, which is divided into two branches—the interpretation, called *tafsin*, bearing on the doubtful points, and the tradition, called *hadith*. To give an idea of the importance of the latter, which ends in overloading the memory, and in stifling the intelligence of the Mahometan theologians and jurisconsults, it will suffice to say that the treatise of Ibn-Magêh contains more than four thousand different traditions, and the collection of El-Bokari contains more than seven thousand two hundred and seventy-five. These great works have been abridged in manuals, versified like

the *Jardin des racines grecques*, which render the study more mechanical, and consequently still more stultifying. Criticism has nothing to do with traditions that are dogmas; the memory alone is to retain them, and it is impossible for it, either not to succumb to this prodigious effort, or take in it an exaggerated development to the detriment of the other intellectual faculties.

Side by side with this instruction quite special, El-Azhar fosters equally courses more literary: rhetoric, elocution, prosody, rhythmical reading are there sufficiently taught. As to logic, the sole remnant of ancient philosophy that has survived the general suppression of pagan sciences in the grand Mussulman university, it is taught by means of a didactic poem, called *Es Soullem*, or the ladder, which signifies that this science serves as a step to all the others, and a treatise named *Issagougi*, drawn up by the sheik, Athir-ed-Din-el-Abhari, and which is no other than the exact reproduction of the *Isagoge*, or introduction to the organon of the neo-Platonist, Porphyrius. It is this last work that has especially contributed to popularize in the East the philosophy of Aristotle. But, alas! so little of it is comprised therein, and so badly explained, that there are not wanting professors at the mosque of El-Azhar who are convinced that this introduction of Porphyrius to the works of Aristotle has been written by a learned sheik of the name of *Issagougi*.

In spite of its incontestible efficiency of organization, the mosque of El-Azhar, "the flowery" or "the flourishing," can then merely contribute to arrest the progress of the Mussulman world towards modern civilization. Many students live there all their lives; they there enter first the primary school, in order to learn to read, to copy the Koran and recite it by heart. After having broken in their memory by this first supreme effort to the most difficult exercises, they pass from the primary school to the higher classes; they choose a professor, who undertakes to teach them and interpret to them one of the works forming superior instruction; they follow his instruction the whole time necessary to master this work to its slightest details; then, when they can recite it by heart, they obtain from the master a certificate, an *agazéh*, a real *licentia docenti*, that permits them, in their turn, to teach the learning they have just acquired. One easily understands the utility of these certificates for a teaching, founded wholly on the authority of interpreters, and which is addressed only to the memory. Every tradition is perpetuated from master to master; it is transmitted from one to the other with a scrupulous fidelity; and one may go back, in the case of most of them, in following a genealogy absolutely certain, as far as the *ansars* or companions of Mahomet. But every professor does not possess all the traditions; each of them keeps a certain number of them, as extensive as possible, but necessarily limited.

During the Mussulman Middle Ages, the students went from one school to the other in order to collect unceasingly new ones, as the German students of our days pass through several universities, in order to follow in each of them the courses of celebrated masters. The longest journeys are nothing to them, when it concerns receiving from authorised lips a genuine tradition. It was thus, that Makrizi had followed the lessons of more than six hundred professors, Al Mizzi more than a thousand, and Al Dahabi more than twelve hundred. At present, since nearly all the great centres of Mussulman learning are extinct, the students have little interest in quitting El-Azhar ; that is the reason they often remain there during their whole life, going from professor to professor, gathering in the tradition of which each is the guardian, obtaining continually new certificates that attest the extent and variety of their studies. Sometimes sheiks, imans, and cadis, who have long quitted the mosque, return there also, to obtain fresh certificates. That is the reason the grey-bearded student and the child of five or six years old, lisping hardly a few verses of the Koran, mix indiscriminately together there. They pursue, at El-Azhar, art for the sake of art, and learning for the sake of learning, and no one is tired of remaining or returning there, for every auditor, as learned as he may be, finds there always a new and incontestible truth—since it descends in a straight line from the prophet—

to store up in the inexhaustible treasure of his memory.

It is seen, therefore, that El-Azhar is one of the most curious institutions of Islamism, one of those especially, that best explains how Mahometanism, after having given a lofty swing to the human mind, has in some way stopped short and congealed for ever in a mould, too cramped for modern civilization to be capable of developing itself there with ease, and bearing all its fruits. It has exhausted its vital force ; it is a curious fragment of the Middle Ages ; but if it does not undergo a thorough change it can have no future prospects. There is, however, something grand in it, and in our time when one appreciates documents so highly, he could not study too much this historical document, that bears witness to a glorious past.

As an architectural work, the mosque of El-Azhar has nothing very remarkable ; as the last specimen of a world that is crumbling away, at least in Europe and on the Mediterranean coasts of Asia and Africa, it is, on the contrary, worthy of the highest interest. The spectacle of these thousands of multicoloured students, mingled with these innumerable columns of marble, presents, besides, an admirable picturesque effect. It is at the mosque of El-Azhar especially, that it is so fine to see the Arab prayer : there, a faith, ardent, invincible, and relatively enlightened, animates a multitude of men and boys of all ages, who are bowing down, kneeling, and prostrating themselves in

cadence, whilst the muezzins cause to resound from the top of the minarets, the strange and poetic melody of the call to prayer.\* These compact masses execute all the regulation movements with a regularity in no way automatic, for one perceives in some manner, souls under these agitated bodies.

Mussulman learning and theology are condemned to inevitable decay ; already the Government schools, wherein are expounded the principal branches of modern knowledge, create a sharp competition with El-Azhar ; the sheiks themselves, come to them in rather large numbers. But the Mussulman religion, and the belief in a sole God and His prophet, are not ready to disappear, neither from Egypt nor from the rest of the world. The mosque of El-Azhar will have endured profound revolutions, its system of instruction will have been utterly overthrown, its old traditions will have been interrupted already a long time, when still will be heard there, the voice of the muezzin, crying out in a slow and impassioned tone, "*La ilaha ill Allah !*" whilst a devout multitude are bending with emotion towards Mecca, soul-stirred at the solemn breathing of the prayer and the faith !

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\* " On a still evening, when the muezzin has a fine voice, which is frequently the case, the effect is solemn and beautiful beyond all the bells in Christendom."—*Byron*.



## CHAPTER XXV.

### THE DEPARTURE.

WHEN one quits Cairo, after a sojourn of several months, he experiences an impression of profound melancholy. Innumerable souvenirs rise up in the mind, countless images get confused in the memory, and produce there a kind of whirl. The route from Cairo to Alexandria unfolds for the last time before the eyes all the pictures of Egypt; mud villages, palm groves, elegant groups of fellahs, and retreating lines of the desert vanishing into a sky wonderfully pure. However little fine the weather may be, one embarks at Alexandria, on a sea whose blue waves are so still, that it might be taken for a lake rather than a sea. During a day or two more, the moisture and transparency of the atmosphere, the intensity of the light that colours the clouds with vivid tints, recall the East; then all the hues die away, all the reflections pale or disappear: one recognizes Europe! One must have very little poetry in his soul not to feel sad. The mirages of the oriental shore are sometimes as charming as the mirages of the

desert : who could see them fade away without regret ?

I repeat, however, the first impression, one feels on leaving Egypt, wants distinctness. One fancies, he is waking from a dream that disappears little by little as the ship sails towards the north. One is still dazzled by the clearness of Egyptian landscapes, when he finds himself face to face with European landscapes, and this produces the blinding sensation left on the sight by the extinction of a fairy illumination. The eye has need of a fresh education to habituate itself to the subdued tints, almost sombre, of our western climates. It is still more difficult to put in order one's ideas, to class the observations, one has made. Each of them had appeared at first ineffaceable in the memory, but in the end they become too numerous, too varied, not to impair each other. Egypt is so rich a country in every respect ; it offers such an abundant harvest of traits of manners, historical souvenirs, philosophical or political reflections, etc. ; it affects so strongly the imagination, and gives such a lively stimulus to the mind, that it would require, not months merely, but years even, to know it in a way at all well. Finally, how is it possible to pass without transition from the placidity and complete liberty of Egyptian existence to the uneasy habits of Europe, without feeling some weariness ? It is not with impunity that one remains whole days stretched carelessly on oriental divans, and then finds

himself afterwards on our easy and other chairs of the West : it then seems that you are imprisoned in these apparatus that expose the limbs to a constant torture.

I have felt perhaps, much less than others, these vague and multifarious sensations of the departure. A part entire of Egypt, a whole division of this admirable country, had remained almost completely hidden from me. I had been, neither at Karnac, nor Thebes, nor Philæ ; and it was as a mere curious tourist that I had visited the Pyramids, Memphis, Heliopolis, San—all the monuments of ancient Egypt that are situated in the environs even of Cairo. I had not searched the ashes of the gigantic societies, whose remains still attest their extraordinary power : the thought had not struck me to attempt to recover the traces of that civilization, prodigious in its external manifestations, that raised the Pyramids, scooped out the Hypogeum, carved out of the rock immense Sphinxes, set up the Obelisks, boldly elevated blocks we have trouble to move with our most powerful engines, then, in uniting gracefulness to force, decorated its enormous constructions with light hieroglyphics, the design and colour of which are so marvellously preserved, that they might be taken for processions of living beings filing before colossal ruins.

The study of Egyptian antiquities, at the source, has now made such progress that it is no longer possible to devote oneself to it as an amateur : it is

necessary to devote oneself to it entirely, or accept the results of it, such as erudition hands over to us, without pretending to examine them by personal observations. Fortunately, the rôle of Egypt does not finish with the dynasties of the Pharaohs, and it is not necessary to go back to the dawn of its history, still very obscure, in order to find in it a wonderful field of study. After having initiated Greece into science and philosophy, after having been the central luminary that has sent forth its beams to lighten and warm up again the ancient world, it has, it is true, suffered an eclipse, like a fire whose fuel has been transported elsewhere. But when Greece became extinct in its turn, it was on the shore of Egypt, it was at Alexandria, where shone forth a new flame that was to spread gradually over Europe and dispel, before its advancing beams, the long night of barbarism. Driven beyond their too confined frontier by that need of adventures, that poetic instinct, that religious ardour, and by that warlike taste, which one moment was on the point of rendering them masters of the universe, the Arabs in their first march fell in with Alexandria. Chance decided their future. Suddenly enamoured of a civilization, the grandeur of which was comprehended at a glance by their delicate and ardent imagination, they seized its radiant flambeau in their warlike hands, to carry it straight before them, as far as the feet of the Pyrenees and even beyond. Thus Egypt, which had been the

cradle of human knowledge, has been in some way the bridge that has permitted this knowledge to pass without loss from the ancient world to the modern.

It is the Arabs who have served as agents in this evolution, and it will be to their eternal honour, having fulfilled with splendour so great an historical mission. Instead of falling, like barbarians, like diverse war-like races, upon countries fertilized by Greco-Latin civilization, they have arrived there as enlightened conquerors, capable of continuing the traditions of antiquity, of developing them even with an admirable versatility of mind. I do not know if there exists in history a phenomenon so strange as the rapidity of the extension of Islamism. At the appearance of Mahomet, Arabia was more divided than Italy in the first years of the Roman power. Rome had taken five or six centuries to create Italian unity and conquer the world. A few years sufficed Mahomet to unite all the Arabs under the same standard, and Omar was already capable of leading them to the conquest of the universe. Twenty years after the death of the Prophet, Persia, Syria, Egypt, and the north of Africa, are not merely conquered, but assimilated. The wave of the Mussulman invasion swells more and more, it gains Spain, it sweeps past the Pyrenees, and rushing on dashes against Poitiers. All that requires but sixty or eighty years ; and yet this conquest, almost instantaneous, is so stable, it penetrates so profoundly the populations over which it extends,

that it would require centuries to drive it back ; and even if we have succeeded, after prodigious efforts, in extirpating the dominion from Europe, we have not yet torn it from Asia and Africa, where the political degeneracy of the Arab race has not brought on the fall of Islamism.

It is in the deficiencies, as well as in the qualities of the Arab genius, that we must look for an explanation of an historical event that strikes at first sight with profound astonishment. Gifted to a prodigious degree with the subtile faculties of the mind, the Arabs are wanting entirely in strong faculties. None assimilate more rapidly than they the most complicated operations of the sciences, but simple ideas, that serve them as a basis, however little they may be new or original, remain strange to them. Deprived absolutely of invention, they have created nothing in religion, in philosophy, in mathematics, in art ; they have done no more than perfect everything in developing the details and the brilliant side of things, without ever going back to the principles, in order to test them, to adopt or reject them, according to the degree of evidence that is in them.

Their chief work, the Koran, is but a composition from the Bible and the Gospel, a composition, renovated by means of a poetic form appropriate to the instincts of their race, but deprived of profound dogmas and pregnant metaphysics that have rendered the two records, Jewish and Christian, the most perfect aliment

of religious thought. At the moment when the Koran penetrated into the north of Africa, an indifferent Christianity loosely allied itself there with the last vestiges of antique philosophy. The Arabs, in not being too abrupt with the manners of the country, in bringing a religion, very summary and no wise in contradiction with Greek spiritualism and African Christianity, did not encounter in men's minds any of those resistances that render almost always precarious the success of force. Provided that their religious forms were adopted, forms that were too vague and too evident to admit of much interest in repelling them, they required no other proof of submission. As for them, they showed as much good will as that they claimed from others: they attended without hesitation the schools of the learned and the philosophers of the antique world. This Arabian civilization so vaunted, and in some respects so worthy of the praise that has been heaped on it, what has it produced that is original, what new course has it enabled the human mind to take? In astronomy it has carried to the last possible degree of perfection the system of Ptolemy, but without ever venturing to submit it to the least criticism; in philosophy it has remained continually under the authority of Aristotle, and has had the honour to inaugurate the scholastic, but it has brought forth nothing that resembles the bold initiative of a Descartes or the admirable good sense of a Locke; in medicine it has developed the

principles of Gallienus without ever succeeding in reaching the idea of direct physiological observation : in a word, in all the branches of human knowledge it has been merely the prolongation, brilliant but servile, of ancient science. Of infinite fecundity in secondary discoveries, in theoretic subtleties and logical deductions, it has never come out of the limited circle in which it was enclosed immediately after the capture of Alexandria. Finding, on going out of the desert, from its first effort to possess itself of the hegemony of the world, the precious deposit of a science already established, it has had the glory of preserving it ; it has not renovated it. This is the way it has imposed itself without much trouble on nations from whom it demanded to modify in no way their mental state. The Arabian inundation has covered the coasts of the Mediterranean with a flood far-reaching but shallow, one that has flowed in every direction without scooping out anywhere a bed where it might rest pure and free from heterogeneous admixture.

The heir to antique civilization, it is then in its passage into Egypt that Arabian civilization was obliged to detach itself from the form it had preserved for centuries, and which in the midst of a Europe given up to barbarians, had made it long shine with a great splendour. But if it has introduced nothing new into the modern world with regard to the sciences, it is not the same with regard to the arts, or rather one art—that of architecture ; for sculpture and painting are denied



to it, and music does not suit it at all. Is it to say that the Arab genius has done otherwise in architecture than in philosophy, in astronomy, or in medicine? Has it invented a new form? Has it not been satisfied rather in developing a form already found and in drawing from it the most varied effects? To understand it well, Arab art is but the prolongation of Persian art, as Arab science is but the prolongation of Greek science. But Greek science existed in Europe and Africa before the Arabs, whilst it is they who have brought there the new art. We were ignorant of its origin : we have believed they were the true creators of it.

The monuments of Cairo, of Sicily and Spain, resembled in no way what antiquity had produced, and in their style are equal to its most exquisite productions. One might find therein without trouble a fresh proof of this special nature of the Arab genius, that carries to extreme perfection the art of details without ever imagining combinations of original lines, though the stone in them is chiseled into ornaments as complicated as the subtile commentaries, with which the Arab philosophers have framed the thought of an Aristotle or a Porphyry. That which is a defect in the sciences is otherwise a merit in the arts. The eye and the imagination delight to wander unceasingly in the lace-work of the stone of the Cairo mosques, in the innumerable designs, in the polychromatic painting of their ceilings, in the

decorations of all kinds that cover and embellish them. Admiration never arrives at becoming tired, because the spectacle is continually new. However beautiful may be the Greek monuments and the *chefs-d'œuvre* of Italian painting; by dint of seeing them, we end in knowing them so well, that we make no longer any discovery in them, and the impression they produce is repeated without being renovated. It is not the same with Arabian architecture. It would take years to grasp all its *finesses*; they change, moreover, in aspect, according to the hour of the day, according to the place where one contemplates them, according to the proximity or remoteness of the spectator: as they have no definite form, as they are the product of a fancy always free in its caprices, one proceeds continually from one surprise to another, and the imagination of the observer may therein give itself as complete a range as that exercised by the art itself.

We are therefore justified in saying that, setting aside their architecture they have brought there, the Arabs have taken almost everything from Egypt; and this marvellously prolific country has been for them what it had already been for the Greeks,—the great source of civilization. But its historical rôle ends there. The Turks who conquered it after the Arabs, the Mamelukes who have ruled there after the Turks, have reduced it to a deplorable sterility. The admirable manifestation of art that had been pro-

duced under the Arabian dominion, has stopped short like everything else, and during long centuries the valley of the Nile has known but the debasing evils of a régime of military feudalism that had reduced it morally and materially to the most hideous wretchedness. The French expedition has delivered it from this régime which Méhémet Ali would never have destroyed if Bonaparte had not shaken it to its very foundation. Since that time Egypt has been following a new destiny. Among the Mussulman nations of the East, she alone desired to make some effort to become a nation of European civilization, and if she has encountered in this enterprise deceptions singularly cruel, it would not be just to say she has completely failed. Her progress seems immense when one compares it with the starting-point. It is possible that the accidents of contemporary events may stop her all at once in her normal development, to subject her to a fresh conquest: it would be a great evil to her and to all the world. The experiment she attempts will, if it succeeds, have too great an influence over the future of the entire East not to desire that it may indeed fully succeed. The day when it would be proved, that an Oriental nation could raise itself to modern life, with the moral support of Europe, but without alienating to any one in any way its individual independence, many dangers that now threaten the world will be dissipated. As for us, we French, who have

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been hitherto the most faithful allies of Egypt, and who have succeeded in implanting there our ideas, our language, our administration, our habits, and our sentiments, could we desire anything else than to see a country, whence civilization has twice set out to spread over the West, fulfil a mission of the same kind in an opposite direction, and become the pioneer of European civilization in the East?

THE END





